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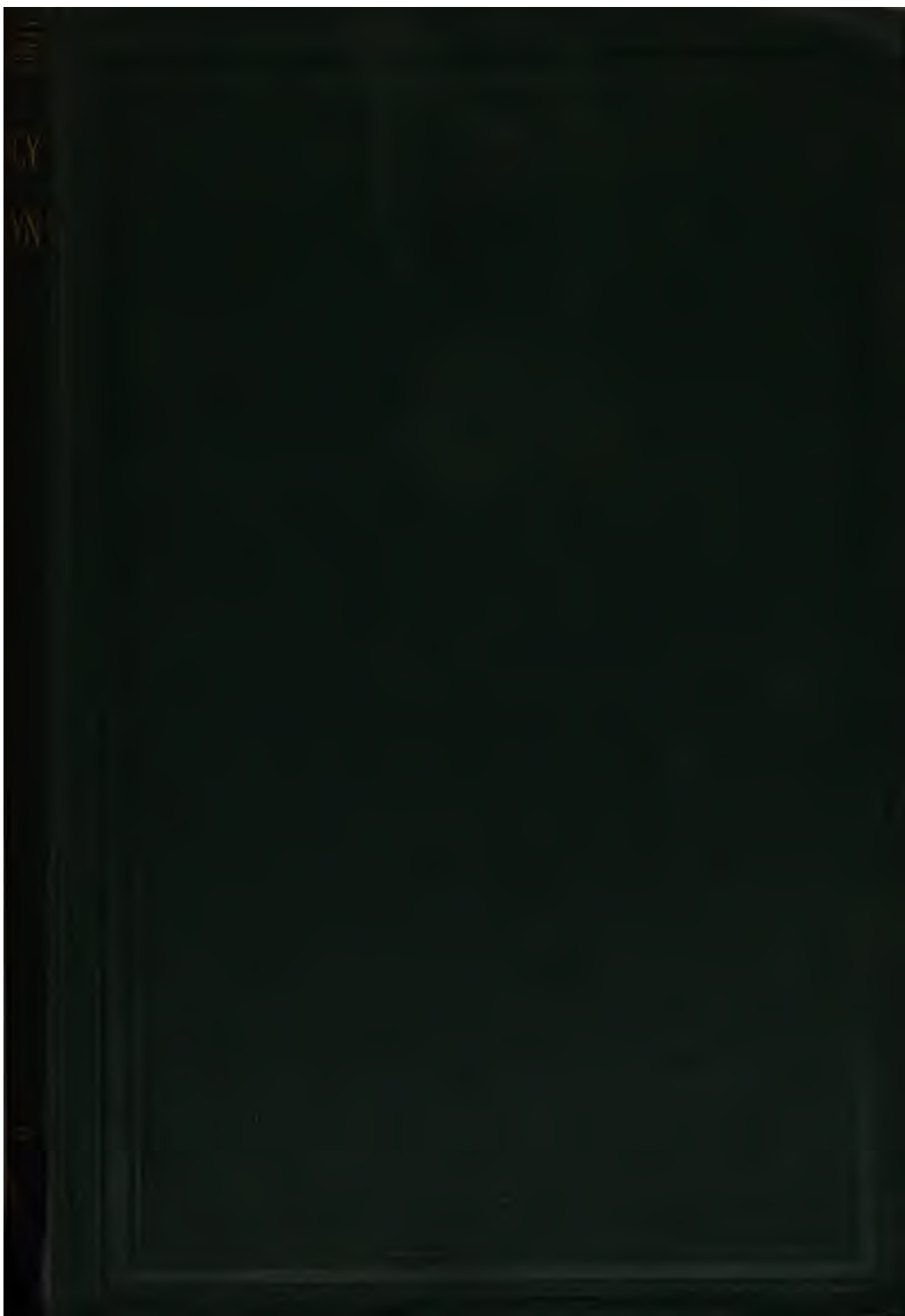
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CLEMENCY FRANKLYN

CLEMENCY FRANKLYN

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "JANET'S HOME"

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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CLEMENCY FRANKLYN.

CHAPTER I.

Still in the wind, a helpless reed thou art,
Caressed or trembling 'neath its tyrant will ;
And could'st thou not, ere now, rebellious heart,
Learn to be still !

Thou, who would'st snatch at golden dreams afar,
Forlorn and unenriched must pine and weep !
Oh, patience, patience ! each eternal star
Its path must keep.

THE weeks which Miss Arnays and Clemency spent at High Combe were regarded at the Manor as the most perfect harvest weather, known for many years. They were the busiest weeks of the whole busy summer, and certainly the most inconvenient time for a member of the household to choose to be ill. Mrs. George Serle had no manner of patience with such a proceeding. She could believe in a person's having a bad feverish cold at Christmas time, and pity him for it if he did not persist in keeping it too long ; but an illness in harvest time, in the hot August and still

September days, when every moment was precious, and when the energies of all the women in the house ought to be directed to providing for the extra workers out of doors, was a weakness which she could not allow any one under her jurisdiction to give way to without remonstrance. Sydney, who was the culprit that year, did not give her sister as much cause for complaint as might have been expected. Even Mrs. George was obliged to allow that she struggled for a long time to keep her place in the house, and was quite as unwilling to allow she was ill, as the rest of the household were slow to perceive anything amiss with her.

No one could exactly say when the failure in her health began. When Mr. Humphreys was first consulted he laid the blame on the ball at Mrs. Franklyn's, and talked in a grave, aggrieved tone of a certain walk in the garden undertaken without proper precautions, which had, doubtless, done all the mischief. Mr. Serle blamed himself bitterly for not having taken better care of his daughter that night, till everyone in the house reminded him that Sydney had been quite well and unusually happy for at least a week after the ball. The children were all sure that she had been the busiest and merriest of the party, when they had gone to see the first sheaf of corn cut, and when they had gathered

the last apricots from the orchard wall; and Mrs. George testified to her having shown a zeal about the autumn preserves, that had almost made her hope she was becoming a useful woman at last. As far as any one could recollect, there had been a gradual increase in Sydney's energy, till it had degenerated into a feverish restlessness which seemed to forbid her remaining in one place, or keeping to one employment for five minutes together. Then the wan looks and the fits of exhaustion began to appear which had alarmed Mr. Serle.

Sydney herself could not have given any better account of the change; she did not know how she had slipped down from the heights of hope to the depths of despair. For the first week after the ball, she had moved about in a golden haze of joy and wonder, beyond which she did not care to look. She was rather glad to hear that Colonel Edgecombe had left Combe. She did not much wish to see him again just yet, or to hear any more from him, till she had grown accustomed to the wonderful events of that night. He had called her dear Sydney—he had held her hand—he had assured her that he did not care for Clemency Franklyn. That was quite enough for her for the time, for though the belief in his love made her very happy, the prospect of having to see a good deal of him, and talk quite freely

before him, was formidable enough to make her very glad to have it postponed for a while. He so often said things she did not quite understand, and she was afraid he would not be as easily satisfied with random answers as Mr. Humphreys was. Then there was the terrible thought of how Mrs. Edgecombe would look at her, after she knew that she was to be her daughter-in-law. For about a week, Sydney was thankful to be able to enjoy her happiness without the drawbacks she knew must follow the public acknowledgment of it.

She felt very complacent, like a queen in disguise, towards all the people who would hereafter have to look up so far to her, and treat her with such respect. She told the children wonderful stories of what she would do for them one day; and while obeying Lizzie's orders meekly about the preserves, she consoled herself by inventing little patronising attentions by which she would hereafter, without any unkindness, mark the distance between them.

But days passed on, and a little restlessness began to insinuate itself into her joy. She hardly liked to think how long the interval of silence had become. One day, a thought struck through her like a poisoned arrow: perhaps she had misunderstood him—perhaps he had not meant what she thought, or had only been trifling with her. She tore the suspicion out of her

heart again, but the wound remained ; and after that she began to dread the passing of each day, for every one that went without anything happening seemed to confirm her unacknowledged fear. It was a feverish, miserable state to be in, and she had no sort of trust or hope in higher guidance, to help her to bear the suspense. There was nothing present to her mind but the one intense passionate wish to have her way, whether it were right or not for herself or others. She did not acknowledge that she was unhappy—that would have seemed like giving up all ; but she could not prevent herself from starting every time the old clock in the front kitchen struck an hour, or from hating the recurrence of each little daily or weekly duty that marked the passing of time in the regular household, or from feeling every evening, as the sunlight faded out of the valley, as if one more ray of hope faded out of her heart, and darkness deepened there.

It was a relief to her that no one remarked her restlessness and want of appetite, or the feverish glow that burnt in her cheek. Yet sometimes she felt it hard and strange that the people round her should be so occupied with their own concerns, that no one of them noticed how wearily the bright days passed with her. Finding her always pre-occupied, the other members

of the family began to leave her out of their schemes for work or amusement; even her father discovered that his eldest granddaughter, little Lizzie, was a more interesting companion, in a tour over the farm, than Sydney was now; and Sydney, when she saw him setting off on his afternoon rounds with the little one trotting after him, as she used to do years ago, felt bitterly that she had let herself slip out of her place at home, and that the one person to whom she had believed herself important, was learning to do without her.

To fill up the time and keep herself from thinking, she began to take long solitary walks, always aiming at getting, as far as possible, out of sight of the Combe Woods. It was after one of these, when she had wandered beyond her own knowledge and lost herself in the dreary country of unworked stone and coal pits beyond the Valley, that her first alarming attack of illness came on. Mr. Humphreys, who was called in, was very grave over her symptoms. Her father's anxiety was fairly roused, and she had to resign herself to the character of invalid, which she had so long struggled against.

At first it was almost a relief to be obliged to give up her efforts to go about as usual. While she was lying still on the sofa in the drawing-room, only knowing what was going on in the rest of the house by the occa-

sional intrusion of one of the children, or by her father's visits, it hardly seemed as if the days were passing; it was like a pause in time which need not be accounted for. She might, she thought, put off her task of expecting and doubting till the indefinite period when she should be well again. Her father's extreme solicitude was her greatest pain. He used to come in so often to ask after her, and stand looking at her so wistfully and enquiringly, she sometimes thought his anxious eyes would read down to the bottom of her heart, or draw the words of explanation from her lips. It seemed so cruel to let him go on wondering what ailed her, when she knew so well herself; and was so sure that no medicine could do her any good, only the hearing a word or two that might yet be spoken any day.

She would hardly have restrained her longing to confide in him if there had not been other enquiring eyes fixed on hers that steeled her against the tender curiosity of his. One day, while Mr. Humphreys and Lizzie were whispering together in the window, she overheard the words—"Something preying on her mind;" and after that, she noticed that Lizzie came in and out of the drawing-room, oftener than was consistent with her previous complaints about the inconvenience of having to look after fanciful invalids during the press of her

autumn business. A few soft words, even from a person she did not much love, would have won confidence from Sydney just then ; but soft words were not at all in Lizzie's way, besides she did not wish to be confided in, she always preferred finding out for herself. Sydney's words would have passed for nothing with her, compared with her own observations ; she had had her eyes open all the time, and she considered she knew what was going on better than anyone could tell her.

She watched and put things together, and waited till she thought the right time for interference had come, and then she took an opportunity of speaking her mind. Poor Sydney knew all day that it was coming. Everybody in the house knew the premonitory symptoms of a fit of mind-speaking in Mrs. George ; the pursed-up lips that only opened for the shortest yes-and-no replies ; the obstinate expression in her eyes, the wrinkled-up forehead, the heavy, ominous footfall, as she moved about the house during her morning's employments. Every one knew what they portended ; but that day Sydney had the additional certainty that the inevitable outpouring was coming upon her, and that there was only one subject it could concern.

While she lay on the sofa in the afternoon, listening with throbbing nerves to her sister-in-law's move-

ments overhead, that made all the casements in the old house shake, and calculating how soon her upstairs occupations would be concluded, and the dreaded interview might be expected to begin, a desperate resolution came into her mind. She resolved that she would not hear what she believed her sister-in-law was going to say to her. It was bad enough to have been misled ; but to have Lizzie taunting her with her disappointments and her presumptuous love was just that last bitterest drop which would make her cup of pain undrinkable. She would at any cost push that from her. She thought of a sentence she might say which would triumphantly answer Lizzie's accusations, and prevent any repetition of them to her or any one else. She knew it was a very serious thing to speak the four or five words of the sentence she meditated ; that they would alter the whole course of her life afterwards ; and yet, as she dwelt on the coming interview, picturing all its details to herself, her determination to say them became every moment stronger. All suspense and expectation would be over then. No one need ever know what she had hoped, how she had suffered ; and surely, when everything was settled, a sort of peace would come even to her. When at last she heard Lizzie's step beginning to descend the stairs, she searched in a little

work-basket for a letter that had come to her that morning, wrapped round a bottle of fever medicine. She read it hastily through once more, tore off the blank sheet, wrote a few lines on it in pencil, twisted it into a note, and laid it by her on the sofa-table. Then she lay back on her pillow, very flushed and panting, and Lizzie, burdened with a great tray of preserve-jars which wanted labelling, pushed open the drawing-room door, and entered.

Mrs. George had no intention of letting her fingers be idle while her tongue was busy; and she thought she might as well give Sydney a chance of employing herself usefully while she was being scolded.

Sydney was too much flurried to think of offering any assistance. She lay back on the sofa for a long time, watching her sister-in-law's movements, and almost wishing that the lecture would begin. They were quite alone in the house. It was a hot September afternoon, the first day of loading corn, and all the children and the servants had gone into the field to look on or help. Distant echoes of their voices came through the open window, mingled with the thousand delicious sounds of a September afternoon at Vale Combe—the perpetual babble of the tiny rivulet at the bottom of the garden, the hum of the bees in the

clematis round the front door, the far-off bleating of sheep on the opposite hill. A gentle wind brought all these close to Sydney's couch, but to her they were all drowned in the click of the jars Mrs. George was arranging, and in the beating of her own heart, which she tried in vain to still, lest Mrs. George should bring its agitation as a witness against her.

The silence was broken at last. Mrs. George took, for her text Sydney's supineness, in lying on the sofa when work, in which she might have taken part, was before her eyes; and for half-an-hour or so Sydney let her talk on without interruption. She had a great deal to say on the vanity and folly of girls who fancy that every man who pays them a little attention, is about to make them an offer; and on the wickedness of letting a really suitable match pass by, for the sake of some out-of-the-way, fancied preference.

As long as she kept to generalities, Sydney could listen quietly; but when proper names came in to the tirade, and Mrs. George accused her of pining herself ill for Colonel Edgecombe, who, she averred, had never thought more of her than of little Lizzie, then the courage to bring out the annihilating sentence she had prepared came to Sydney.

She sat upright on the sofa, fixed her large brown

eyes, now burning with a singular light, on her sister's face, and spoke almost fiercely.

"Lizzie, you must never say such a thing as that to me again, for it is not true; and I won't hear it. I am engaged to Mr. Humphreys—he would be very much displeased if he heard anyone speak so to me now."

The announcement was quite as startling, and the victory as complete, as Sydney had expected.

Mrs. George put down the jar she was covering, and remained silent for a minute.

"Well, I think you might have told me," she said at last, in a very subdued voice. "It was very unsisterly, to say the least of it. Pray how long have you and John Humphreys been engaged?"

"Only to-day. He wrote to me, and here is my acceptance. His servant is to call for it at five o'clock, and he will come himself this evening. You may read the letter if you like. He cares for me and thinks well of me, if no one else does. Don't you ever praise him or blame him again to me after to-day, for he is a great deal better than you or me. You have always been wishing me away, Lizzie, and now I hope you will be content. Little Lizzie can have my bed-room; I know you want it for her; and she can go about with my father, and take my place;—I don't grudge it to

her—only you had better let me be at peace as long as I do stay here ; and beware how you ever again speak as you did just now about Colonel Edgecombe. Now, if you like to bring the ink to the sofa, I will write the labels for the preserves for you, and we will work together for the rest of the afternoon without quarrelling.”

Sydney's face had such an unwonted expression in it, and she spoke with such a tone of authority, that Mrs. George was, for once in her life, quite put down and conquered. She brought the ink to the sofa, and answered Sydney's questions quite meekly ; and for the rest of the afternoon, sat subdued and silent over her work. The proud, defiant spirit Mrs. George's accusation had roused, remained with Sydney all the evening, and gave her strength to play the difficult part she had imposed on herself. It enabled her to tell her father of Mr. Humphreys' offer, and answer his eager, fond questions in such a way as perfectly satisfied him. It made her brother George's perpetual jokes on the subject of her engagement tolerable ; and it carried her safely through the ordeal of her first short interview with Mr. Humphreys.

When she went upstairs to bed at night, leaving her happy, triumphant lover to receive the congratulations of the rest of the family, she felt almost happy. Every-

one round her seemed content with her. Her father had put his hand on her head, and blessed her fondly. George had looked pleased and proud ; and there had been something more than content in Mr. Humphreys' face, when he followed her to the door to bid her good-night, with which she could not help being a little touched.

He was very ugly, and he used incomprehensible words, and walked oddly on the points of his toes when he came into a room ; but he certainly loved her very much ;—there could be no doubt that *he* meant every affectionate word he had ever said to her, and a great deal more than words could say,—it *must* be well to have such love, and to make so many people happy. Sydney reflected ; and with such thoughts as these she tried to satisfy herself.

But the excitement that had kept her up all the afternoon, died away even before this amount of reflection, and the next morning found her in the weary, despondent state she had been in before. Poor Mr. Humphreys was sadly puzzled by it. He called her complaint by a fresh name every day, and was constantly finding out some new good reason, why his former remedies had had so little effect, and why the last-thought-of ones must benefit her. It never

crossed his honest mind to suspect that there could be any secret trouble weighing on her now. He was too happy, too grateful, and too unexact to find any want in her ; or to think of blaming her for any failure in love to himself. He had always some generous excuse to make when the impatience and petulance of her manner to him, shocked and perplexed her father and brother. "No one knew better than a doctor," he used to say, "how natural it was to the best-tempered people, to be a little unreasonable when they were suffering."

Yet his anxiety about her health grew with his determination to admit no other cause than illness, for the change which everyone was talking about.

On the day when he confided his troubles to Miss Arnays, he spent several hours at Vale Combe, and though Sydney walked about the garden with him for nearly an hour, and afterwards sat in her usual place in the window-seat, patiently sewing in her old way, while he pulled to pieces the flowers they had gathered, and explained their properties to her, there was a weary, suffering look on her face all the time that went to his heart.

He attempted to mix his instruction with a little ponderous playfulness to amuse her ; he made her observe how the flowers of the little blue speedwell may

be blown from their calyxes by the slightest puff of wind, and he told her that the Germans had for that reason christened the flower "Man's faith." "It might be German's faith," he said, "but it was not Englishman's, —at least not his." His, like himself, was solid and firmly fixed, and it would take a great many angry or scornful puffs from her lips to blow him away.

Sydney did not even give him a glance up from her work in reward for his speech, but she held out her hand for the flower, and a minute afterwards he perceived, that she was trying the experiment of puffing the blossoms away, and to his amazement her large eyes filled with tears, when the delicate blue cups floated from her high in the air. Nothing but the extreme weakness, consequent on great derangement of health, could, he was convinced, account for such extraordinary sensibility. He rose to leave some time afterwards, ostensibly because he had another visit to pay, really because he could no longer bear to see her sitting before him so sad and weary.

He begged Mrs. George to persuade her to go to bed as soon as he had left, but Sydney was in an obstinate mood, and could not be drawn from her place in the window. One of the children brought her tea there, and she sat looking out till long after it was too dark

to distinguish even the tall, white lychnideas in the nearest garden bed. All the evenings of that summer seemed to pass in review before her, without any effort of her own to call them up: the times in the early spring when she had sat there looking at the turrets of the Great House among the budding trees, and wondering what Colonel Edgecombe, and Mrs. Edgecombe, and Clemency were doing within; the evening when she and Colonel Edgecombe had talked about the cherry-tree, and the succeeding one, when she had expected him, and Mr. Humphreys had come instead.

She took a sort of pleasure in dwelling on the incidents of that evening; her vivid disappointment when she saw Mr. Humphreys' face at the door—her anger with him for coming just then—the irritation which the monotonous sound of his voice kept up in her mind all the evening. Pitying herself for that long-past pain, was a sort of compensation for not daring to look at a very present one—only too like it—for which she knew she must never pity herself. She was occupied with these pictures when she heard some sounds without that seemed almost like the echo of her thoughts. Unexpected steps on the gravelled road; the undoing of the gate after it had been fastened for the night; a man's step pausing at the front door. Could Mr.

Humphreys have ridden back to the house from High Combe? It did not seem likely, yet who else could it be? Sydney remembered she had promised to go to bed several hours before, and did not like the thought of all the fond remonstrances on her imprudence, she should have to hear if she were found in her present position. She had time to move from the window-seat to the sofa, and rest there for a little while before the room door opened. It was only Mrs. George, bringing in the lighted lamp. She put it down on the table, and began to move about the room, arranging the chairs and gathering up the stalks and leaves of the flowers Mr. Humphreys had thrown down. There was a look of mystery and caution, and a subdued excitement about her, that roused Sydney's curiosity at once.

"What is it, Lizzie? what has happened?" she said.

Lizzie came close to the sofa, and whispered, "Some one has come—a visitor—Colonel Edgecombe, wanting very much to speak to you. I hope you'll be careful what you say to him. For mercy's sake don't repeat what I said the other day. I was quite mistaken, and you need not tell ——"

Mrs. George paused in her whispered cautions. Sydney did not hear them, her eyes had looked beyond

Mrs. George to the doorway, where Colonel Edgecombe was standing, waiting for a sign or word from her to bid him enter.

He came forward, as soon as he saw the start of joyful surprise with which she recognised him. Mrs. George saw him stoop down and take one of her trembling hands in both his, and then she slipped out of the room, shutting the door behind her.

"I was just going to caution her not to say a word to him about her engagement to John Humphreys, which we must get her out of now as quickly as possible," she said to herself; "but I see there's no need, she won't so much as remember there is such a person as John Humphreys while Colonel Edgecombe is with her. Well, Serle-like, she has got herself into a mess, and will want me to help her out of it. I'll do my best to make it all smooth for her; and afterwards, when she is Mrs. Edgecombe, she must understand she is not to give herself airs towards me. It is fortunate for the Serles that they have me to think for them. I'd never have let Sydney engage herself if I'd had the least idea she had any chance of this other one. But to be sure, who would have thought it?"

Mrs. George was right in her estimation of the fidelity of Sydney's memory. All thought of John Humphreys

and of her promise to him, did pass out of her mind while she was listening to Colonel Edgecombe's professions of love. The sudden revulsion from despair to joy was too overwhelming, to leave her any thought but for the person whose presence had wrought the change.

Mrs. George took care that the interview should be a very short one, pleading Sydney's state of health, and the lateness of the hour, as excuses for sending Colonel Edgecombe away. Sydney had only time to comprehend the wonderful fact that Colonel Edgecombe did love her, that he was asking her to be his wife, and that he had been hoping all this time that she was remembering and trusting him.

When he had gone, and she had listened to the last sound of his horse-hoofs which it was possible for her to hear, a sudden agony of fear lest he should be angry with her for having doubted him, brought the first recollection that came to trouble her of her promise to John Humphreys. Mrs. George found her in a terrible paroxysm of weeping when she returned from fastening the front door, and had to exercise some ingenuity, to get her upstairs without betraying her trouble to her father. The strangest thing in all that strange evening to Sydney, was the being helped to bed,

and soothed and comforted by Mrs. George. "You leave it all to me, and I'll manage your father, and your brother, and John Humphreys, and everyone," that lady said, as she shaded the night-light from Sydney's aching eyes and prepared to leave her. "John Humphreys is too good-hearted a man to stand in the way of the good fortune that has come to you, and the family through you, to-day. He'll see plainly enough that he must give you up, when I put it to him in the right way; and as to your father and George, I'll talk to them, too."

It did startle Sydney a little, to think that she was allying herself with Lizzie to overrule her father, but her head was aching too much for thought that night. When she shut her eyes, visions of Colonel Edgecombe's face as she had seen it in the doorway, or as it had looked bending down over the sofa, floated up to her, and she fell asleep thinking that she would do and suffer anything rather than see the look of love upon it change to one of contempt or anger. She would be Lizzie's slave for life if she could save her from that woe.

CHAPTER II.

All this the more confused my brain : and nothing could I realize,
But the great fact of my own pain : I saw the fields : I heard the cries :
The crow's shade dwindled up the hill : the world went on : my heart
stood still.

Owen Meredith.

MRS. EDGECOMBE'S anticipated happy day began with an annoyance, which ruffled her equanimity a little. Before they had quite finished breakfast Mr. and Mrs. Franklyn made their appearance, evidently with the intention of spending the greater part of the day at High Combe. Mr. Franklyn had come at Miss Arnays' request to speak to her on some business connected with her will, and Mrs. Franklyn excused herself for accompanying him by pleading her great anxiety to ascertain for herself, how her dear sister-in-law really was. It might be a weakness in her, she said, but it always did make her so nervous when people began to talk about making their wills. Mrs. Edgcombe was driven to conclude that Mrs. Franklyn enjoyed being nervous,

for she contrived all through the morning to twist the conversation round to conjectures respecting the provisions of Miss Arnays' will, let Clemency and Mrs. Edgecombe start what topics they pleased.

Clemency was engaged part of the morning, in her aunt's room, and when she came down stairs she devoted herself to her stepmother's entertainment. Colonel Edgecombe disappeared immediately after the Franklyns came, and was not seen again till four o'clock, when Mrs. Edgecombe and Clemency met him entering the library through the conservatory, as they returned from taking leave of Mr. and Mrs. Franklyn at the front door.

"Yes, selfish fellow, you are safe!" Mrs. Edgecombe exclaimed. "Come in, if you dare show your face after leaving me to entertain our visitors alone all day. Oh dear, what a tantalizing day it has been! So many wasted hours! People really should not inflict so much talk on one in such weather as this. My dear Clemency, I beg your pardon. I forgot you were here. But you know I should have said the same about any one who had come just to-day when I want to be with Walter."

"Yes, I understand," Clemency said, "and I was sorry to leave you so long, but Aunt Bessie wished me par-

ticularly to be with her while she talked to papa. I am afraid papa has come to the conclusion that I have even less capacity for business than Aunt Bessie. It really was difficult to give my mind to what he was saying. I had to realise such painful suppositions all the time."

"Nonsense, Clemency, no one really thinks people more likely to die because they have made their wills. Aunt Bessie is right to leave herself as few subjects for anxious thought as possible, and she will be happier for it by-and-bye. The discussion her resolution has roused may be disagreeable, but it cannot last. When Mrs. Franklyn has told every one within twenty miles of Tunstall that she cannot see the justice of making distinctions between brothers and sisters, and that no one shall ever persuade her that her children have not as much right to Aunt Bessie's money as you and Rolla, she will drop the subject."

"I wish it were not necessary to talk so much about people's money, or at least that I had not had to hear it. Papa's careful explanations were very much lost upon me. I am confident Rolla would have acquitted himself better, though no one but me ever will believe him capable of understanding anything. He is only three years younger than I am; I hope Aunt Bessie

will begin to trust him and depend on him soon. I don't like her to make so much difference between us."

"As if Aunt Bessie made the difference between you and Rolla, or as if any one could shut their eyes so closely as not to see it.. I quite approve of her plans and precautions. She leaves Rolla more or less in your guardianship instead of you in his, as a person who had thought of your sex and not of your characters would have done. You must submit to your fate bravely, Clemency, for there it is, written in your face. People will always depend on you wherever you go, and you will always have to look after and defend the weak ones as long as you live; it is your nature."

"And your name," Colonel Edgecombe said eagerly; "at least as I understand it now. Mother, I was wondering a few minutes ago, how you came to buy that drooping, meek-looking statue of 'Clemency' you have enthroned on a pedestal in the conservatory, since I have been away. Pity ought to be the strongest and most upright of all the virtues, I think. That drooping tearful figure is a libel on her. I should have sculptured her an erect, eager, alert figure, with broad brow and clear, steady eyes, seeing and understanding clearly enough to make large allowance. One hates the thought of tearful pity."

"Well, you shall dethrone my statue whenever you are prepared to instal a more satisfactory one. I bought it for love of the name chiefly, and a little because I saw something in the shape of the head and the expression about the mouth, that reminded me not of Clemency Franklyn, but of Bessie Arnays as she was thirty years ago."

"Oh, indeed ; well, with that idea I will go back and look at it more tolerantly. It might be better placed. It stands too high on the pedestal, and gets a cross light. It would look far better among the tea-roses. Will you come down here, Miss Franklyn, and I will show you ?"

"Yes do, my dear," Mrs. Edgecombe said, "you have been shut up all day, and I must go and talk to Aunt Bessie; she will want to tell me the result of the morning's conference. See that Walter does not break either my poor 'Pity' or the tea-roses. He may put her where he likes, but I won't have her banished quite."

Colonel Edgecombe seemed to have forgotten all about the statuette, when Clemency reached its stand at the bottom of the conservatory. He stood leaning against the door-post, looking out into the garden, with a very troubled expression of face, and Clemency growing nervous at the long silence between them, began

to talk quickly, about the intense heat of the day, and the burnt-up appearance of the lawn outside ;—how the leaves of the trees were quite crisped and browned already, and how the weeping willows at the end of the garden hung their arms languidly in the quivering air, like tired people. She knew quite well what she was saying, for a vision of the garden, with its many bright-coloured autumn flowers, blazing in the hot sun, remained with her for long afterwards ; but she found it every minute more difficult to think of fresh commonplace things to say, for though she dreaded a fresh silence, she somehow dreaded much more her companion's beginning to speak. He cut short a rambling speech of hers abruptly at last.

“ Miss Franklyn, I am wondering whether I am one of the weak or one of the faulty people, who, my mother says, are always sure to come to you for help ; either way, according to her version of your destiny I have a claim on your attention, and whichever division of your dependants you put me under, you can't despise me much more than I am just now despising myself. I am going to do a very cowardly act. I am going to put a task on you, that I dare not undertake myself. Can you understand how very insignificant and mean I feel while I am making that confession to you ? ”

There was a pause of several minutes: the dazzling light of the garden faded for a moment before Clemency's eyes, and then the whole scene rushed back with painful distinctness, the staring flowers, the brown thirsty leaves, the drooping trees, the intense pitiless sunshine, and with it, always to be connected with it, a sudden understanding—in which the true meaning of the events of the past weeks came out as distinct as the trees and flowers in the sunshine—flashed into her mind. For a moment she looked back at the past, at the deceiving appearances, and the reality as she saw it now, and felt somehow as if she had got out of her own life, and was wondering idly how another person would feel, when the trouble she had just guessed became clear to her. Then, with an instinct of self-preservation to push off the pain from coming just then when it must not be realised, she spoke, and was relieved to find her voice sounded just as usual.

“I think I have guessed what you are going to tell me, but you had better go on. If you wish me to speak to your mother—and I suppose that is it—I should like to know exactly what you want me to say.”

“Nay, I am going to trust that to your own good heart, and your great love for her. I am glad you have

guessed. I have sometimes thought that perhaps, since the night of the ball at your house, you might know. It makes me hope you do not think it will be such a great blow to my mother as I have feared. Last night after our talk, I went to Vale Combe and saw Miss Serle. Yes, I see you guessed rightly,—it is that. We are engaged, and I am such a coward that I dare not tell my mother. I so dread her saying words that I never could forget afterwards, that would make it impossible for her and my future wife, ever to share the same home. My plan is to leave Combe immediately, and write a letter to my mother, which she will get to-morrow; and meanwhile I want you to prepare her, and do what you can to make the surprise as little painful as possible. Is it asking too much?"

"Nothing is too much that I can do to spare her pain," Clemency answered. "She has always been good to me ever since I can remember."

Colonel Edgecombe's face flushed at this answer; the tone in which it was spoken was as gentle as possible, yet it sounded like a reproach to him, and it dismayed him to find how the thought of sinking in Clemency's opinion affected him even now.

"What must you think of me then, for having done

what I know will pain her so deeply," he said. "The gratitude you owe her, is just nothing to what I owe. All through my lonely neglected childhood she was my only friend. She taught me the little I know. She stood between me and my father's anger when I had offended him. But for her I should have been disinherited, I might have been dependent on her at this moment, if she had willed it so, and yet—ought gratitude to make one quite a slave? Ought one to give up oneself, bound hand and foot, and have no will of one's own? Nothing short of that could thoroughly satisfy my mother. You yourself have warned me against yielding too far. You have shown me that there is one point on which you could not be influenced."

"Yes," Clemency answered, still with a feeling as if she were judging a cause quite apart from her own life, in which she had no interest. "There are things it would have been dreadful for you to do just out of deference to your mother. She cannot really think you are to blame for choosing for yourself. I will try to make her see that."

"And I must leave you to defend my choice. You are the only person I have ever heard speak without prejudice of Miss Serle in my mother's presence. I feel it almost a want of respect to her, to confess that

my choice wants defending, but you will be generous. If my mother's indulgence can be won for her, and her forgiveness for me, I can't say what our gratitude will be. Sydney is almost annihilated at the thought of my mother's displeasure, her sister tells me. She would not see me to-day, and it is at her request that I leave Combe for a time, till my mother is accustomed to the idea of our engagement, and won over to consent to it. I think I ought to tell you that I had spoken to Sydney rather on the impulse of the moment, before I went to Scotland, and ever since, I have been pondering how best to reconcile my mother to my intention. I trusted, as I have done more or less all my life, to the chapter of accidents, to open out some way of softening the communication."

"And Sydney?"

"I behaved as inconsiderately to her as to everyone else. I know my conduct won't bear looking at through your eyes; the more you know of it, the more weakly you will find I have acted."

Again Colonel Edgecombe was surprised by the pain, the thought of her disapproval gave him. What a time it was to discover, that after all he cared more for her good opinion, than for that of anyone else in the world!

The sad tone of his voice was the only thing that struck Clemency. She hardly took in the meaning of the words, but it disturbed the calmness she was struggling so hard to keep, and warned her to bring the interview to an end quickly.

"I will tell your news to your mother," she said, "since you want me to do so, and you may be sure I will do all I can, to persuade her to take kindly to Sydney. I think—I hope—persuasion will not be wanted after a time. I believe it will be better for you to be away when she first hears."

"I am sure of it, or I would not go. It is for my mother's sake, you understand, that I venture to ask you to take so much trouble. I know you are the only person who has much influence over her. If she could be brought to see that my engagement need not estrange us, and that she might go on living with me, after my marriage, as happily as she has done hitherto, that is what I want. She can hardly doubt that Sydney will be a gentle loving daughter. I shall, of course, write all this; but a word from you will have more weight than all mine."

"I will do what I can," Clemency answered again, and as she spoke she rose from the garden-chair, in which she had seated herself while the conversation

went on, and moved down the conservatory towards the house.

It seemed so long since she had left it, that it surprised her vaguely to find the afternoon sun still marking the same squares of light, on the polished library-floor. It seemed hours to her since she and Mrs. Edgecombe had stood there together. Colonel Edgecombe held out his hand to take leave of her as they reached the entrance.

"It may be some time before we meet again," he said. "If my mother will not forgive me, I shall go back to India. I could not live on here, estranged from her."

"She will forgive you," Clemency said, quietly releasing her hand from his. "Good-bye!"

She walked down the room and across the hall, looking up at the clock to see what time it was, and stooping to pick up some branches of myrtle that had fallen on the floor, from a nosegay she had given her mother. She tried to fasten her thoughts on every trifling object that met her eyes, lest she should begin to feel the pain that was waiting to take hold of her. There would be plenty of time, days, months, years, she believed, for feeling that. Now she must keep her thoughts free, and

her strength unshaken, for the task she had taken upon her.

With the hope of accomplishing that, rightly, she kept all selfish sorrow at bay.

CHAPTER III.

I am alone.
The past is past. I see the future stretch
All dark and barren as a rainy sea.

Alexander Smith.

WHEN Clemency entered Mrs. Edgecombe's sitting-room, an hour before dinner, she found her at her writing-table, sealing and directing letters. She looked up, smiled, and nodded, and went on with her work.

"From no want of interest, don't imagine that," she said, "only that I may have a clear conscience while I am listening to what you have to tell me. When the letters are gone we shall be secure from interruption."

Clemency went to the window and stood with her back to the writing-table till the servant had taken the letters away, then Mrs. Edgecombe threw herself on a sofa and called her to come near.

"At last," she said; "there, sit down close to me, and let me see your face. You must not be frightened and

shy with me, darling. I think I love you almost as much as I love Walter. I tried once, I confess, to shut up my heart from every one but him, thinking one venture in the world enough for me, who have always been so unfortunate, but you stole in, and now I almost think you have the largest part. I am sometimes glad to think you have no mother of your own, Clemency; I like to think her place is vacant, for me to take."

"Yes, I wish you were my own real mother," Clemency said; "I wish it very much to-day. I always think I could have gone so easily to my own real mother, to ask a favour from her, and that she would have been sure to grant it. If any one had offended her, I should have had a right to plead for them with her."

Mrs. Edgecombe put her arm round Clemency's shoulder.

"My dear child, don't tremble so, and speak with that sob in your voice—I can't bear it. If you have done the thing that you fancy will offend me most, if you have refused Walter, I won't be angry with you. I will only laugh, and set to work to undo the mischief you have done, only you must, please, be quite frank with me. Now, tell me, what has happened. Why does not he come to me himself?"

"You will hear from him to-morrow ; but you will not see him again just yet. He has gone away again for a day or two. He asked me to bid you good-bye for him."

"Good-bye! That is more serious than I expected. How have you frightened him away, Clemency?"

"I have done nothing. Dear Mrs. Edgecombe, please, you must never say anything like that again. Please forget you have ever had such a fancy for a moment about me. He is engaged to Sydney Serle! No, don't start away—hear me a little longer. I have a message from him to you. He asked me to tell you, that you might not be angry. It is only since yesterday ; and he is going to write and explain how it was that he did not consult you first. They both think about you. Sydney will not see him again till you have given your consent. She loves you ; and she is worth a great deal more than you ever thought. Don't you see she must be, or he would not have chosen her. How I wish this moment that I could give up half your love for me to her ; then I could have the other half without any one's grudging it me ; without feeling that your partiality to me had done harm, and divided you from them."

After the first start Mrs. Edgecombe sat still, listening

quietly to Clemency's pleadings ; but a cold expression of resentment came into her eyes, and deepened with every minute she remained silent.

"Walter engaged to Sydney Serle ! He shall choose between us," she said at last. "Between Sydney Serle and me—both of us he cannot have. He must make up his mind between her—and me—who have toiled and planned for him, and given him every thought of my heart since he was born. That is what I have come to. And you, Clemency, you to speak as if my consent were possible ! You to talk of making over my love for you to her, as if it ever could come into her keeping. Well, I suppose some people live without loving or trusting any one. I believe I did once for a short time, after my father died and before Walter was born. I shall have to do it again, that's all."

"I am so sorry," Clemency said. "I know when one is unhappy it makes the pain so much worse to be angry too. I wish I could say anything that would spare you that. I am afraid I have not told you rightly. There must be some good reasons if I could only think of them." She drew Mrs. Edgecombe's unwilling hands back to her and leant her head on them.

"I am not angry with you, darling," Mrs. Edgecombe said, more gently, after a minute or two. "I will let

you pity me. I will even be glad that you have nothing to do with us. There is a curse upon us—the curse of perpetual family discord. I am glad you will never come under it. No, don't begin to plead again. Not another word—I have made up my mind. I am going to write and tell him to choose between Sydney and me. He can do as he likes; but he has disappointed and misled me, and I cannot forgive him. I cannot have her for a daughter. I cannot live in the same house with her. He must choose which of us he will have. I shall tell him just that. Now, go, Clemency, I cannot have you looking at me while I write that letter."

Clemency rose reluctantly, went as far as the door, and then came back and knelt by the writing-table where Mrs. Edgecombe had seated herself. She was trembling so she could hardly speak; but she laid her hand over the sheet of paper on which Mrs. Edgecombe had begun to write.

"Please don't be angry with me," she said: "I know I have no right to interfere; but if you would wait a day before you send that letter, if you would talk to Aunt Bessie. You will both be so unhappy if anything is said or done to separate you quite; and you know a few words might do that now. He said that if you would

not forgive him he would go out to India again. I can't bear to think how lonely you would be when he had gone. If you will talk to Aunt Bessie, I will not say another word."

Mrs. Edgecombe fixed her eyes on Clemency's face as she knelt before her.

"You have more right to be angry than any one else, Clemency," she said, slowly. "It is chiefly on your account that I am so displeased. To think that he—that anyone belonging to me—should even appear to trifle with you. I cannot forgive that. If you have not suffered, it is no thanks to him."

"But if that is your reason—if thought for me has anything to do with your anger, I may ask you to forgive. You see *I* am not angry. Don't let me have the pain of thinking that I in any way came between you and him. Forget all about me, and think only of yourself and Sydney and him, as it is right to do. You must be just to Sydney. She is better than you think her, indeed; and then *he* loves her. You will soon learn to like her for his sake."

"Clemency, how you put me in mind of old times. That generous way of judging. I have known one other person capable of it. But it was a mistake; it

would have been better if he had been selfish and firm. You have exorcised the angry spirit out of me by your generosity,—I am only miserable now. I will wait for Walter's letter, though I dread the pain of reading it. I will talk to Aunt Bessie, too, before I write, and bear a day of suspense as best I may. Now, leave me alone to think, dearest; you cannot do any more good just now."

As she closed the door behind her, Clemency felt as tired as if she had undergone some great bodily fatigue; and during the rest of the evening and through the next day she had the same painful sense of being engaged in an exhausting struggle. Not that she attempted any further arguments or pleadings; she knew that the wisest part for her to act was that of a patient listener, to whom Mrs. Edgecombe might pour out all the bitter feelings her son's conduct roused; and all the gloomy anticipations for the future that in her perverse mood she chose to call up. To hear all this quietly over and over again and give no sign of pain, was a task that taxed Clemency's fortitude to the utmost. Yet she did listen, and put in a soothing word now and then; and Mrs. Edgecombe, deceived by her calmness, was convinced that she had misjudged Clemency's feelings as well as her son's. The conviction, gradually

growing stronger, that her favourite castle-in-the-air had no foundation but her own wishes, did more to lessen her resentment against her son than anything else could have done.

She came into Miss Arnays' room to talk to her once more an hour before post-time, but she found her lying back on her couch with her eyes shut, looking very weary.

"She is worse to-day," Clemency said, softly. "I am sorry I asked you to come to her, for I fear the talk you had this morning did her harm. She cannot bear any agitation."

"Nay, dear," Aunt Bessie said, "I would not be kept out of my friend's troubles if I could, while I am here. I am strong enough to talk if any one wants me."

"I want you, Bessie," Mrs. Edgedcombe said, eagerly. "I have been thinking all day, and I cannot come to any decision. Your judgment must help me once more. Shall I do all I can to prevent this marriage? I can do a great deal both with Mr. Serle and Walter if I like; or shall I give a grudging consent, disapproving of it in my heart, and knowing that it will separate my son from me in the end."

"Have you a right to prevent it?" Aunt Bessie said,

gently. "Is not that the question to decide first? Are not you afraid to go out of your way and do what it is not given you to do?"

"Not given me! What do you mean? I am his mother, and does not my own experience give me a right to judge for him. He is so like me, so capable of suffering as I have suffered. I know what it would be to him gradually to open his eyes and find that the person he had joined to himself for life, had a nature so much smaller, and meaner, and narrower than his own, that there could never be any real sympathy between them. Many men would find ways of bridging over the difference; or learn not to care for it, or sink a little themselves—he will not. When once his eyes are opened, the gulf between them will widen every day, and his unhappiness on account of it deepen. Shall I not do right to take any means to secure his life from such a calamity?"

"Not any means, only the means you have a right to use. How different you and I still are. I am always afraid of acting even when the duty seems clear; and you, after all you have seen, are still sure that your wishes and plans for those you love are what is really best for them. Cannot you yet be content to keep still when you have no right to act, and trust

God to guide them? May not He have plans, and may not they be best?"

"I can't bear to keep still while my son makes a mistake, and brings suffering on himself."

"I am afraid you must bear it, dear. He is a grown man now, and has passed beyond your power to choose and judge for him. You must leave him now to live his own life, and suffer his own experience. I suppose it is a hard lesson. I learned long since to stand aside and see the lives of those I loved best worked out on quite different plans from what I should have chosen, and to bear to be nothing in them. One *can* bear that when one has once felt that God is all."

Mrs. Edgecombe sighed. "You always get beyond me, Bessie, when we talk together. All our lives you have been trying to draw me up to the heights of quietism, where you dwell. I prefer fighting and struggling in the valley, though I get nothing but wounds, and you are at peace. Well, I promised to abide by your decision, and I will not go back from my word. I will write a letter of consent to Walter. I hope you are satisfied, Clemency; it is all your doing and Aunt Bessie's that I consent to the engagement, and that he and I remain friends."

When Mrs. Edgecombe had left the room, the other two sat for some time without speaking.

"Poor little Sydney," Miss Arnays said at last, "she has a difficult life before her. Her first interview with Mrs. Edgecombe will be very formidable to her, no doubt, and that will only be the beginning of difficulties. Poor little Sydney!"

Miss Arnays was softly stroking Clemency's hair as she spoke, and she was surprised to feel her suddenly draw her head away, and push the stool on which she was sitting into the shade, so as to put her face out of the reach of her aunt's eyes.

It was the one movement of impatience after a long day's endurance, but just then it did seem almost too much to Clemency that her aunt should be pitying Sydney. Sydney, who seemed to her so happy, before whom such a brilliant life, rich with such treasures of love, was opening up. It was surely a mockery to be pitying her. Now that the struggle was over, and she saw a smooth path stretched out before those she had promised to serve, Clemency was dismayed to find how little satisfaction she had in her victory. A sentence in her aunt's talk with Mrs. Edgecombe had fallen like a leaden weight on her heart, and she could not just then shake it off again. To stand aside and see

the lives of those she loved worked out and be nothing in them! The prospect of such a lot seemed at that moment dreadful to her. From her dark corner she looked with a sort of amazement at her aunt's pale, thin face, on which the light fell. Had she really passed through such a dark death-river, and were its cold waters waiting for her, too, to step down into? Was she now taking the first plunge into them.

Miss Arnays took no notice of Clemency's long silence, but after a time she began to talk about a scheme she had formed that day of taking a house for the autumn and winter, at some southern sea-side place, and of having Rolla to spend a few months with her, to give him a pleasant holiday between leaving school and being taken into his father's business.

She took great pains to make the plan sound pleasant, and dwelt on the delight it would be to her to have her two dear children with her, where they might enjoy each other's society more uninterruptedly than they had done since quite childish days.

Clemency was often sorry afterwards that she allowed herself to think the gentle talk so dreary, and that she did not find a single word to respond to her aunt's cheerful anticipations.

CHAPTER IV.

For all your love was past and done
Two days before it was begun :—
Adieu love, adieu love, untrue love,
Untrue love, untrue love, adieu love ;
Your mind is light—soon lost for new love.

The unfaithful Shepherdess.

So many disagreeable things happened to Sydney during the first week after her engagement, that she took a fit of philosophy one day and told Lizzie she had discovered that books and clergymen were right after all, when they said there was no such thing to be had as earthly happiness. It did not occur to her to blame her past conduct for her present embarrassments ; she preferred looking on them as evidences of a perverse tendency in fate to put obstacles in the way of human satisfaction. She felt it extremely hard, that after all, though she had gained the summit of her wishes, neither the inward peace nor the outward triumph and glory would come to her. She might almost as well, she said, for any good it brought her,

not be engaged at all. Now and then, indeed, short gleams of fluttering joy came, which made her run up and down stairs in her old nimble way, and brought the colour back to her cheeks; but she was never allowed to retain them long. Something always occurred to check her spirits; disappointing looks from her father and George, such as she had never thought it possible could fall on her from their eyes, or words from Lizzie, which renewed the strange sense now always more or less present with her, of being in her sister's power and holding prosperity on her sufferance merely. It was difficult to reconcile herself to the idea of being befriended by Lizzie, in opposition to her father and George.

She was herself so accustomed to judge of the right or wrong of an action by the effect it had in promoting her own or other people's wishes, that she was extremely unprepared for the amount of disapproval with which her father and brother received the news of her intention of breaking her engagement with John Humphreys, in favour of a more prosperous suitor. She did not see, that dwelling on the difference between John Humphreys and Colonel Edgecombe, and proving how much happier she should be, married to one than the other, was no answer to their remonstrances with her on breaking her promise.

Her promise to John Humphreys now looked to her only like a little slip of the tongue, which in common good-nature her friends should put aside and never allude to again. If it really had prevented her from marrying Colonel Edgecombe, then indeed it would have been a terrible thing to have done ; then she would have reproached and blamed herself all the rest of her life. But since Lizzie assured her that no unfortunate consequences need come of it, she considered it mere cruelty in her father and George to remind her of it so often.

In the days when the hope of Colonel Edgecombe's love had first dawned on her, she had been fond of picturing the scene of her taking her father apart some happy evening to tell him of her engagement. She fancied how fond, and proud, and triumphant he would look ; and how she would soften any slight pain he might feel in the prospect of parting with her by planning all sorts of pleasures that were to come through her to the rest of the family, and making him promise to spend almost all his time at High Combe,—better dressed than he was now, she imagined to herself, and cured of all tendency to talk of farm business at dinner-time. The engagement, which was the cloudy, uncertain part of the picture then, was a

fact now, but the accessories were all so different, it was hardly recognisable as the thing she had dreamed of.

When she went to speak to her father, after Lizzie had paved the way, she was received as if she were a foolish child, who was speaking of what she did not understand. And even when Lizzie's persistence and energy had brought him to look upon the change in his proposed sons-in-law as an accomplished deed from which there was no drawing back, he could not be persuaded to look on the new state of things with complacency. When Sydney tried to talk grandly before him about the favours she would bestow on every one by-and-by, he would sit shaking his head with a disapproving look on his face, and if she ventured to include him in any of her plans he cut her short decidedly.

"No, no ; not for me. I will have nothing. It is a bad business, child, and I can't bear to hear you talk about it. Lizzie has persuaded me not to interfere, and if John Humphreys is satisfied to give you up, as Lizzie says he is, I suppose there's no more to be said, only I don't understand it. How you ever came to promise yourself to two men is beyond me. The Serles were used to keep their promises. And John Humphreys—such an old friend, too ; he has never

missed coming out and shaking hands with me when I have ridden past his house at Hemsley, for the last three years. I shall have to ride round by bye-streets to keep out of his way now, for I shall be ashamed to look him in the face, and that's what I never expected to feel towards any man on account of my daughter's doings. If you were going to be married to a king, it would not make up to me for that; but—there, there, don't begin to cry, darling! I don't want to make you cry; only you must not expect me to say wrong is right, for all your and Lizzie's talking."

George Serle, being yet more under his wife's influence, did not venture even so much show of opposition as this, but Sydney noticed an oppressed, cowed look in his face, and observed a disposition in him to keep out of the house as much as possible, which she knew by past experience were always symptoms of his having been driven by stress of his wife's temper to give in to some course of conduct of which at heart he disapproved. Next to her father's reproaches, the sight of this look on George's face, and the knowledge that she was the cause of its being there, was the thing most capable of paining Sydney. She felt far more remorse for having changed her side in the old family quarrel than for having changed her lover. Till Colonel

Edgecombe's first letter came, she had moments of feeling ready to turn upon Lizzie, and reproach her for giving bad advice, and declare herself ready to marry John Humphreys or anybody, if her father and George would only look pleased with her again.

The receipt of the first letter changed her feelings, and gave a new turn to her anxiety. It gave a sense of reality to the engagement she had wanted before ; but at the same time it opened her eyes to a new peril. Colonel Edgecombe wrote, under the fear that Sydney might be exposed to expostulations on her engagement from Mrs. Edgecombe, and he seemed anxious to fortify her against any possible self-reproach or hesitation, which might assail her. A very observing person might have suspected that the writer was arguing down scruples in his own mind, as well as combating possible ones in that of his correspondent, when he dwelt so earnestly on the sacredness of a promise once spoken, and the right it gave to the two bound by it, to put aside all considerations which seemed to conflict with the duty of keeping it.

No such suspicion occurred to Sydney's mind. She was wholly absorbed in another thought, which flashed into her mind as she read, and made every kind word look like a reproach or a warning.

“What will he think of me, if he ever comes to know that I have already broken such a promise?”

The flattering estimate of her character, which the letter showed; the high sense of honour, and delicate scruples she found attributed to herself, gave a new poignant agony to this fear. It was so sweet to her to be well thought of and praised. She should have been so glad to take Colonel Edgecombe's opinion of her as the true one, and believe herself capable of feeling all the beautiful things he expected her to feel, if only there had not been this plain deed to witness against her to herself, and make her see on what an insecure footing she held his precious estimation. She had brought the letter to her own little garret to read, and when she had finished she threw herself on the bed in a paroxysm of bitter weeping. Her father's and her brother's disapprobation had not brought any distinct sense of wrong-doing, but the contrast between her lover's opinion of her and the reality of her conduct, awoke, not quite repentance yet, but some stirrings of conscience. If they had only been deep enough to determine her to confess the wrong she had done to Colonel Edgecombe, and accept the position in his opinion she rightly deserved, she would have had cause to be thankful all her life for that hour's humiliation.

Unhappily she had not strength of principle for such a resolve. She allowed her grief to exhale itself in vague self-pitying murmurs against the hardness of her lot, which would not let her be happy even on the morning when she held her lover's first letter in her hand, and instead of healthy resolutions she only drew from her remorse an exaggerated notion of the necessity of keeping her fault a secret, and a determination to submit to any tyranny from Lizzie rather than let Colonel Edgecombe know she had ever done anything he would disapprove.

Mrs. George came up to the garret to seek Sydney in the course of the morning, and was surprised to see her lying on her bed, with traces of tears on her face.

"I hope there's nothing wrong in the Colonel's letter," she said, walking up to the bed-side and looking searchingly at Sydney. "I declare I got quite nervous when you rushed up-stairs and shut yourself in. If he were to go back now, Sydney, a pretty position you would have got yourself into. It would be a case of slipping between two stools, indeed. It was a sad pity we had to send Colonel Edgecombe away, one never knows what may happen when people are away. Let's see how he writes to you."

Sydney snatched the letter out of the way of her sister-in-law's inquisitive fingers, and thrust it into the very bottom of her pocket. Hearing such words, with that letter open before her, made her face glow with shame. She had a sort of feeling as if Colonel Edgecombe must be hearing them too, and she felt all their coarseness and meanness through his sense rather than her own.

"It is a very kind letter," she said. "He talks of coming home in a day or two, when he has heard again from his mother. There's nothing in it for you to trouble yourself about."

"Oh, very well, as you please; only if I did not trouble about you, I wonder where you would be. Why John Humphreys has been here for an hour, and I have had such a scene with him. And all the servants waiting about for their morning orders, and everything in the house at a stand still. I'm sure I hope you mean to make it up to me sometime, Sydney—all the trouble I'm having for you now. However, he won't leave the house without seeing you, and your father upholds him in it, so you'd better just go right down and talk to him. I've had enough of it."

Sydney slid down from the bed, trembling and shaking. "Oh, what shall I do, what shall I say to

him? You promised me that I need not see him again; that you would manage all. I declare, Lizzie, I had rather give it all up, and go quite away, and never marry anyone, or see Colonel Edgecombe again. I would indeed! I can't go down."

Lizzie grew frightened at the wild excitement in Sydney's eyes, and softened into as much kindness as she was capable of. "Come now, don't be such a baby," she said; "he will not expect you to say much. You have only to be firm in letting him know that I have spoken by your wishes, and that no one has influenced you against him."

"You don't think he'll be very angry or very unhappy," Sydney said, going to the glass and beginning to pull out her curls and arrange her dress a little.

"I think if he knew what a provoking peacock you are," cried Lizzie, exasperated at the delay, "he would think he had had a lucky escape from you. There! ten o'clock, and nothing done in the house."

"I'm ready," Sydney said, meekly. "Where is Mr. Humphreys?"

"You can go into the drawing-room and wait. He will come to you there soon. I've sent him into the nursery to look at little Willie's foot, which he hurt

with a rusty nail, climbing up the waggon yesterday. I thought I'd better secure Mr. Humphreys seeing it to-day, for he'll never be so ready again to ride out here as he has been."

Sydney had to wait nearly ten minutes in the drawing-room, and her dread of the interview lessened considerably as she waited. She thought Mr. Humphreys could not be very miserable if he could give so much time to doctoring little Willie's foot, and she came to the conclusion that she herself was more to be pitied for all the vexation and blame the rupture of the engagement had brought upon her, than he was. It is always easy to meet a person one has injured, if one can conjure up a feeling of resentment on one's own account.

When Mr. Humphreys entered the room at last, his deliberate step and methodical way of placing his hat and umbrella exactly in the same places where he was wont to put them, took away the last remnants of Sydney's compassion. She had no conception of controlled sorrow, and her imagination was of the shallow kind that takes account of outside appearances chiefly. There was something ridiculous to her in the idea of a plain, bald, middle-aged man feeling anything *very* deeply. As she looked at him, she felt quite equal to

speaking her mind boldly, and guard against his carrying away any self-deception respecting her regard for him, which might be inconvenient by-and-by. He asked her a few questions about her health, and talked of Willie's injured foot for some time, in his usual long-winded professional style, and Sydney gave short, cold answers and began to fancy herself dignified. When she should be Mrs. Walter Edgecombe, of Combe, she thought she should not find it difficult to snub people and put them down as she had often admired her godmother for doing. At last there was a long pause. Mr. Humphreys cleared his throat a great many times, and drew out from his pocket the three or four little notes Sydney had written to him during their short engagement. Sydney could not help noticing that his hand shook as he held them out to her, and his grave voice sounded very husky, in spite of all the previous clearing, as he said,

"I see you are displeased with me for insisting on this interview, but I could not be satisfied to part with your letters till I had begged you to read them once more, and then tell me whether your sister's message conveys your true feelings towards me, or whether these do."

All Sydney's little pretence of dignity fell from her

at the sight of her own letters ; it was too hateful and frightening to be reminded of their existence now, and to recollect that when she wrote the last she had been trying to feel kindly towards Mr. Humphreys, and that she had said what she thought she ought to say, rather than what she really meant.

She pushed them away petulantly. " Why should I read them ? I am sorry I ever wrote them. It is true what Lizzie has told you. I wish you would believe it, and—and—let me go. I don't like talking about it. It's unkind to make me."

A sort of greyness came all over Mr. Humphreys' face, and he cleared his voice again before he spoke. " I am very sorry to distress you, but remember this is a matter that concerns our whole lives, yours and mine. I trust I am not a vain man, and I know I have no great worldly advantages to offer you, but I think I can't be mistaken in believing that you did love me once. Your sister may be urging you to make an advantageous marriage without regard to your true feelings, and I should be acting a cowardly part if I did not make one appeal to them. You must have loved me at least a little when you wrote that last note."

" No, I did not," Sydney answered, quickly. " I

never exactly said I did. I—I have never loved you at all.”

“Think again ; do yourself justice. All the early part of the summer, when you allowed me to be so much in your company. That day when you gathered a bunch of forget-me-nots for me, from the brook. You were not playing with me and deceiving me all that time? I was loving you truly, as I never before loved, and never again shall love, any human being. Look at me and speak the truth solemnly to me, Sydney. You never could have been deceiving me all that time.” He rose from his seat as he spoke, and stood straight before her, and Sydney felt constrained to look up in his face. It might be a very commonplace, uninteresting one, but it had an expression of stern sorrow on it, that made even Sydney turn away her eyes in pain.

“I am very sorry,—indeed I am,” she said.

“But you have not answered my question. If you did not love me, why did you give me reason to think you did? Why did you give me the forget-me-nots on my birthday? Why did you promise to be my wife?”

“I—I am afraid I forget all about giving you the flowers,” Sydney faltered. “I think it was only

because I had quarrelled with Lizzie that day, and I wanted to be friends with some one. And when I wrote that first note I was so unhappy I did not care what I did."

"I have never been anything but a plaything or a tool to you then?" he said.

"I did not mean any harm. I wish you would not ask me so many questions," Sydney answered, beginning to cry.

He turned away at sight of her tears, walked to the window, and remained, what seemed to Sydney, an immense time, looking out. It was not really long for the change it wrought in his state of mind. He was a good, honest-hearted man, who had always lived more for other people than for himself, and who had lived through his youth, and on to middle age without experiencing any very strong emotion. In the midst of the prose of a toilsome, circumscribed life, a beautiful dream of love and happiness had come to him. It had stolen gradually into his heart, surrounding the common events of every day with a golden halo of interest, opening his eyes to beauties and meanings in nature, to which he had been hitherto blind, lightening his present toils, glorifying his future with dearest and tenderest hopes.

In that interval, while he looked over the little garden that had lately become so inexpressibly dear, the light in which he had been walking now for many months died out for ever, and he bent his shoulders to take up the burden of the old, grey, colourless life again. He would carry it manfully all his days, never letting any one know how heavily it weighed upon him. He had too many opportunities of knowing what other people had to suffer, to pity himself much, or fancy there was in his lot any unusual cause for murmuring, yet, nevertheless, he would carry a sore heart and weary feet to the fulfilment of his duties for many a day. It was, however, a perfectly composed face he turned to Sydney.

"I will wish you good morning now, Miss Serle," he said. "This painful interview may be ended here. I understand you perfectly at last. I do not think my love deserved such treatment as you have given it, but you will never hear another reproach from me. If you had loved me as I thought, I believe I could have made you happy; since you do not, I can only hope that the man you have chosen may be as good to you as I would have been."

"Oh, dear, I wish you would not say such uncomfortable things," exclaimed Sydney, to whom the solemn

words sounded somehow like a prophecy of evil. "I am very sorry ; I did not think you would mind it so much. Oh ! please, I wish you would say before you go, that you don't think so very ill of me for what I have done."

She followed him to the door, and in her eagerness for an answer, laid her hand on his arm, and looked up in his face with the wistful expression in her eyes he had once thought so bewitching.

"You do care for my good opinion then," he said, softened and comforted somewhat.

"Oh, I don't know about that," Sydney answered, quickly. "I want to know. Do you think if—if it had been you I had liked best, should you still have been angry and thought ill of me, as I am afraid you do now."

Mr. Humphrey's face darkened again. "I think I see what is passing in your mind," he said. "I cannot recommend you to have any concealment from your future husband, if you do marry ; but as far as I am concerned you need be under no alarm. Colonel Edgcombe will never hear a word that could lower you in his estimation through me, or any one over whom I have influence. I can never think of you again as I did, but I shall be always ready to serve you and yours."

He went without another word, and Sydney retreated hastily to her room again, more dejected than she had been when she left it.

Mrs. George, who was watching about in some anxiety for the interview to be over, went into the drawing-room as soon as she heard the front door close after Mr. Humphreys, and seeing the little packet of Sydney's letters lying on the table, she carried them upstairs with her, and locked them in a secret drawer of her own, saying to herself that Sydney was too careless to be trusted with important letters. They were safe in her keeping, and might in some unexpected way prove useful some time.

CHAPTER V.

Wahr liebt, wen Eifersucht entflammt,
Doch besser liebt, wer sie verdammt.

Haug.

Gewisz ist es fast noch wichtiger, wie der Mensch das Schicksal
nimmt, als wie es ist.

W. von Humboldt.

THE embarrassment of receiving Mrs. Edgcombe in the character of future mother-in-law, was so much less than that of dismissing Mr. Humphreys, that Sydney had hardly any trepidation to spare for the interview, for which so many people were pitying her. Of the two, Mrs. Edgcombe dreaded it the most, she had promised her son to call and see Sydney, but she made excuses to herself for putting off the duty from day to day. Clemency surprised her into a sudden resolution at last, by announcing her own intention of calling at Manor Combe, to bid Sydney good-bye, on the morning of the day when she and her aunt were to return to Tunstall.

"My dear, why should you go to see her?" Mrs. Edgecombe asked, in rather a reproachful tone; "why waste your last morning on her?"

"I shall like a last walk through Combe Woods to the manor," Clemency said, "and I should be sorry not to see Sydney again. You know Aunt Bessie talks of spending the whole winter at Seaford, and we go next week, so I shall not have another opportunity of calling."

"I grudge your wasting an hour on her—there; don't look shocked—I am struggling hard to thrust my prejudice against her, as far out of my own, and everyone's sight and hearing as possible; if, just now, it springs up, like a jack-in-a-box, inopportunistically in people's faces, it is because I have not had time yet, to screw the lid of resolution tightly down. You will see how impenetrable I shall be by-and-by."

"The prejudice will not be there to hide soon, I hope," Clemency said. "You will really like her. You used to be fond of her once."

"Fond! well, perhaps, fond is not a bad word for what I felt. One is fond of a pretty little lap-dog that plays antics, and follows one about. Yet, one may not think well of the judgment of the person who offers it for one's constant companion. I suspect, moreover, that

I shall have cause to be thankful if my lap-dog does not forget its pretty antics, and take to snarling at me."

"You will come with me this morning to see Sydney, however; will you not, dear Mrs. Edgecombe?"

"So that is what you have on your mind, is it? You will not let me shirk my duty? Well, it will be best so. I shall escape the terrible *tête-à-tête*, and the wish to satisfy you, will help me to be cordial. I will tell you what I will do. You shall walk through the wood alone, and I will call at the manor for you on my way to Tunstall. It will be a 'good excuse for cutting the first visit short, that we shall have a long drive before us, and that your aunt will be waiting in the carriage."

"But will that be sufficiently like a call on Sydney?" Clemency asked, hesitatingly.

"Quite; it is all I can bring myself to do; and as Walter returns to-morrow, I shall be glad to be able to meet him with an easy conscience. It would be horrible to have to call at Manor Combe with him, and act the part of relenting mother, joining their hands. I am quite resolved there shall be no scene of that kind. I wonder how good old Mr. Serle will behave, he is the only one of the family I can endure, the thought of

owning as a relation. The others will be either set up, or cringing, and from this time forth High Combe will never be free from them."

Clemency had been looking forward to this solitary walk through the Combe Woods all the week. Whenever she felt oppressed by the consciousness that her aunt's eyes, with a fond, anxious expression in them, were following her about the room, or furtively studying her face as she sat beside her, pretending to read ;—when- ever she felt irritated almost beyond bearing, by the necessity of always finding something soothing to say in answer to Mrs. Edgecombe's forebodings, she comforted herself with the prospect of that one solitary hour, when she might look as she liked, and have her thoughts free from the demands that had hitherto been made so incessantly upon them. She did not, however, find the solitude, when she tried it, as soothing as she had expected. There are some moods of mind, to which the bounteous, bright aspect of nature in late summer or early autumn days, is more oppressive than even unwelcome human companionship. Trees bathed through and through with sunshine, and bright floating clouds, and waving golden corn-ears, do not certainly pry up or down to inquire the secret of a sorrowful face, but they have a triumphant, calm gladness about them,

that carries a rebuke and a chill with it, to a heart that is not in a mood to share their rejoicing.

"Why do you bring your poor, mean, little sorrows into my great calm?" Nature seems to say sometimes, and her scorn is harder to bear than human lack of sympathy.

The pain which Clemency brought with her into the Combe Woods, was precisely of the kind most liable to feel itself so rebuked. The sorrows that can be talked about, that can challenge sympathy by recognised names, may have strength to assert themselves even in the face of Nature's smiling unconcern. It is the secret, nameless pang which the sufferer hardly likes to recognise, even to himself, to which she, as well as everything else, is unkind.

The Combe Woods, too, were full of memories for Clemency, which she had made up her mind must never be looked at again. It did not comfort her to accuse other people or believe herself injured. To her generous and trustful nature, the humiliation of supposing herself altogether mistaken and self-deluded, bad as it was, was easier to bear, than the bitterness of accusing others. She had no wish to look back to find excuses for what she had thought and felt. Instead of lingering in the woods, as she had intended, she hurried on,

passing all the well-remembered resting-places, where so many happy hours had been talked and idled away in the early spring, without turning her head to look at them. They were all so many enemies to her, in whose hands she had herself placed weapons, with which they might wound her. Once clear of the woods, and in sight of Vale Combe Manor, she walked more slowly. The prospect of an interview with Sydney grew formidable when it was close at hand, and she began to wonder at herself for having undertaken it. Surely it was an unnecessary pain. She stood for some time leaning on the little gate at the end of the wood, which communicated by a steep hill-path with the orchard and fields behind Vale Combe. The old Manor House, with its pretty garden, clustering farm-buildings, and adjacent fields, lay like a map at her feet. She could see the dwarfed figures of the men moving about the farm-yard, and make out a group of children playing by the brook, and decide with certainty that a white robed figure, moving up and down one of the garden paths, was Sydney herself. As her eyes mechanically followed their movements to and fro in the bright noon-day sunshine, a strong sharp conflict went on in her heart.

"Why should she," she asked herself, "take so much

trouble, and endure such pain, as she foresaw this interview would cause her, for nothing else than to aid Sydney in securing Mrs. Edgecombe's good opinion—the only one thing that was wanting to perfect her triumph and happiness? Had she not already got what ought to satisfy anyone? Was it necessary for her to put Sydney in the way of taking her place in Mrs. Edgecombe's heart, as well as that other place she had already gained? Why should she work so hard to draw those two together? When Mrs. Edgecombe was thoroughly satisfied with Sydney, and they were all happy together at High Combe, what room would there be in any of their minds for thought of her?" And to hide the selfishness of these considerations, a false humility came, suggesting that it was presumption in her to fancy she could give advice or aid to one who was judged worthier than she, who at all events had not made the fatal mistake of giving her love where it was not valued. Clemency covered her face with her hands to shut out the sunshine, while she wrestled with the dangerous bitterness of that thought. Given way to, and allowed to plant itself firmly in her heart, it might have narrowed all her sympathies, and turned her sweetness to gall. A moment of darkness and bitter pain passed over her, while she debated whether she should

keep back the word of counsel and encouragement she had planned to speak to Sydney, while they were alone together, and linger about among the trees till Mrs. Edgecombe's carriage came in sight, or whether she should go forward and allow herself to be seen by the person who was walking in the Manor garden. It was to her what another mental conflict had been to Arthur Yonge, a crisis in her soul's history, in which she deliberately took the side of self-sacrifice, instead of self-pleasing, and recognised the higher law as the rule of her life. When she lifted up her head again, the victory was won. She opened the little gate and ran down the hill. She had taken her resolution. It might be little she could do, her aid might not be wanted, but she would not lose a possible opportunity of serving Sydney, or be guilty of the meanness of weighing her friend's regard for herself against their happiness. Let them all be happy together and forget her. She did not see now how she could bear it, but she might be stronger by-and-by, and at all events towards that end she would work.

Sydney met her at the orchard-door. She had a letter still open in her hand, which she had evidently been reading as she paced up and down among the trees, and she was all flutter and excitement at the

sight of Miss Franklyn. She had been used to look up to Clemency as a rather more important and fortunate personage than herself, and now between foreshadowing of coming dignity and remembrances of past jealousies, she hardly knew how to comport herself. Her flushed face, looking up doubtfully from under her white sun-bonnet, was so bewitchingly pretty and childlike, that Clemency, forgetting everything but her sweet looks, felt a warm rush of admiring love, which quite lifted the pain she had been struggling against out of her heart. She stooped down, and surprised Sydney by an affectionate kiss.

"I am so glad to see you looking quite well again," she said, warmly.

Sydney drew back, pleased, but not quite knowing what to make of it. "She never did that before," she thought to herself. "I suppose everyone will make much of me now. How pleasant it will be; but I must not let myself be too familiar."

"Will you come in through the orchard and the kitchen-garden, or will you walk round to the front door, Miss Franklyn?" she asked, rather stiffly.

"If you please," Clemency answered, "I will walk up and down with you here. I came to see you and no one else; and we shall be more likely to

be alone together here than in the house, shall we not?"

"Yes, if you are not tired," Sydney said, hesitatingly; and then she gave a frightened glance into Clemency's face, wondering whether she had an uncomfortable message to give her from Mrs. Edgecombe. Could she have heard about Mr. Humphreys, and be going to reproach her with her misconduct? She would have been still more uneasy if it had not been for the letter received that morning from Colonel Edgecombe, which she had in her hand, and in folding which she occupied herself, during their first turn up and down the walk.

Clemency had all the talk to herself for a long time. She told of her aunt's failing health, and of their intention of being absent from Tunstall all the winter. At length she mentioned Mrs. Edgecombe's purpose of calling at the Manor that morning; and, while Sydney was still looking startled at the announcement, she managed to get out the few kind words of congratulation on her engagement, which she wished to say.

"You know, then?" Sydney said, flushing deeper still, and turning her head away. "Mrs. Edgecombe has told you; I thought she would. She always used to make quite a confidante of you. I have not had a word from her about it yet."

"You will to-day," Clemency answered. "My knowing could not be helped, as I was staying in the house; and besides, you know my aunt is Mrs. Edgecombe's earliest friend."

"Yes, and you have always been her favourite of us two; of course I have seen that all along. She would much rather have had you for her daughter than me. It is strange that things should have turned out as they have, is it not?"

Not knowing how to reply to this speech, Clemency was silent; and they paced the length of the orchard walk twice, without speaking.

At length Sydney's anxiety to learn something of Mrs. Edgecombe's feelings towards herself, overcame her jealousy, and in her natural timid manner and gentle voice, she said,—

"Do you think Mrs. Edgecombe is very much disappointed? Is she angry with me, do you suppose? Has she said anything to you about me?"

"You will see her to-day, and she will be very kind," Clemency answered. "If you will not think me interfering, I should like to say something to you about her."

"Oh! I shall be so much obliged to you, if you will. I should like to know how you contrive to get

on with her so well. I can manage some people, but not her; it would be really very generous of you, if you would put me in the way."

"That was not quite what I meant," Clemency said. "Mrs. Edgcombe is not the sort of person that anyone should ever try to manage. She is too good to want managing. Perhaps I know her a little better than you do, and that makes me long to convince you that you need not be afraid of her. The way to get on with her, is to be quite frank and open, and to say exactly what one really means and thinks; then one always finds her just and kind; the only thing that really displeases her is showing that one is afraid. If you meet her half-way, and show that you count upon her justice and kindness, she will never disappoint you—you will soon win her heart. Only don't let the little sharp things she says sometimes throw you back, and prevent you from being your natural self before her; you will find that there is no real unkindness in them. That is all I ever thought of venturing to say."

"Oh!" Sydney said, in a puzzled tone, "it does not sound much. When we are living together, I don't suppose I shall feel so much afraid of her as I am now. At least, not after I am married; there will be no reason why I should then, you know. Why, *I* shall be

Mrs. Edgecombe myself then ; I shall not need to be afraid of anyone. You don't think I need, after I am married ?" Sydney went on, noticing a shade of disapprobation on Clemency's face, and wondering what she possibly could have said to call it there.

Before Clemency, in despair of making herself better understood, had decided how to answer, Sydney's courage was put to the test.

Little Lizzie came flying down the orchard to tell her that Mrs. Edgecombe was waiting in the house, and that mamma desired Aunt Syddie to come in directly.

"I am glad you are here, Miss Franklyn ; I am glad you came first," Sydney remarked, in a kinder tone than she had used yet, as they entered the house together ; and from that moment she kept close to Clemency's side, as if she felt her presence a protection.

They found Mrs. Edgecombe standing before a little pencil sketch of Sydney's mother, that hung above the high chimney-piece. She had thrown her head far back to look at it, and Clemency perceived, at the first glance, that her countenance wore an expression of softness and relenting, such as she had not seen on it for many previous days.

Mrs. Edgecombe did not change her attitude when the two girls entered.

"There is a good deal of likeness to your mother in this sketch, Sydney," she said, without turning her head. "I wonder your father lets it hang up there in such a bad light. It is only by chance that I have to-day found out how to look at it. You should hang it where it can be seen easily."

"It was Lizzie who put it up there," Sydney answered. "It is a very old thing; the frame is shabby and worn, and the cardboard soiled at the edges. She thought it was best out of sight, as papa would not have it taken quite away."

Mrs. Edgcombe took one more long look, and when she turned round and held out her hand to Sydney there were tears in her eyes.

"My dear, if I were you," she said, "I would not let your mother be put out of sight. She was a good woman, and it does one good to remember her. I am glad my eyes fell on her face just now: it has put me in mind of a promise I once made her, which I may have been in danger of forgetting. Is there not something in the Psalms, Clemency, about a good man swearing to his own hurt, and keeping his word? I did not expect, I confess freely, my dear Sydney, to have to keep my promise of being 'like a mother to you' in the way in which I am called upon to do it now; but the

promise stands all the same. I will not forget it. Since you are to be my son's wife, I will be a good mother to you, if you will let me. Nay, my dear, don't snatch away your hand, don't look so startled; am I such a very formidable person that you cannot bear me to talk to you?"

There was an accent of mortified surprise in Mrs. Edgecombe's voice, which Sydney's strange manner of receiving her advances justified.

At the phrase "keeping his word," Sydney had started, and drawn away her hand; and now she stood still, quite visibly trembling, her eyes fixed on the ground, and one wave of colour after another tingling up to the roots of her hair.

How Clemency longed for the power of getting inside her, and making her give one grateful look, speak one trustful, affectionate word, while Mrs. Edgecombe's relenting mood towards her lasted.

By the time Sydney had recovered sufficient self-possession to bring out some stammering words of thanks, Mrs. Edgecombe's eyes had grown dry and hard again, and her lips had taken the satirical curve, which was too apt to succeed the trembling of unusual emotion.

Old Mr. Serle and Lizzie entered the room soon

afterwards. Their entrance was a relief to everyone ; but though Mrs. Edgecombe's manner was polite, and even friendly, towards them, there was a constraint over the whole party, which seemed to increase as the moments passed.

Old Mr. Serle looked downcast and cowed, instead of elated ; all his pleasant suavity of manner seemed to have deserted him, and instead of meeting Mrs. Edgecombe half-way, and making the difficult matter of congratulations easy to her, he seemed chiefly bent on making it clear, that he did not look on his daughter's engagement to Colonel Edgecombe with any particular favour. He was full of mysterious forebodings, and seemed every moment on the point of saying something which second thoughts obliged him to keep back.

Mrs. George meanwhile sat watching her father-in-law's lips with an intentness, which in itself would have prevented any easy conversation from being established, and Sydney sat with face averted from Mrs. Edgecombe, furtively stealing imploring glances first at one and then at the other. The fear in her face was so very different from the timid anxiety to please, which a young girl might be expected to feel in the presence of her betrothed's mother, that Clemency could not understand how it came to be there. She had

rather have seen any other look on Sydney's face to take away, and remember her by. When they had at length taken leave, and Clemency and Mrs. Edgecombe were in the carriage with Miss Arnays, driving towards Tunstall, Mrs. Edgecombe exclaimed,—

“Well, I have got it over, and I have behaved well,—you must do me the justice of acknowledging that, Clemency. I went beyond myself, in my zeal to act my new character thoroughly, and you are witness how all my efforts failed. No more pearls of sentiment shall I throw down to be shuddered at, you may be sure of that. I wish I could believe in purgatory; then I think I should reckon that I got over a thousand years or so of punishment for my family pride, every time I entered that house. To think of Walter being brother to such a woman as Mrs. George Serle! Yet, if Sydney had been like you, Clemency, I could have overlooked belongings. I never criticise the setting of a real jewel; but a little bit of sparkling glass and tinfoil set in base metal!—think of taking that to stick in your bosom!”

Mrs. Edgecombe made no further comment, on the impression her reception at the Manor had made upon her. She was silent for some time; and, when she spoke again, she turned the conversation on Miss Arnays, and her own plans for passing the winter.

Miss Arnays, nervous at the prospect of a long journey, was anxious to have as few leave-takings as possible ; and it was decided that Mrs. Edgcombe should not see her again, after leaving her at her own door. She expressed a hope, that they might meet and spend part of the winter together at Seaford ; but Mrs. Edgcombe did not second it.

"No, no," she said, "I must keep out of your way for a time ; you would make me too discontented with what will await me at home. I must make a greater effort than that, to put my grievances away from me."

And then she told them of a project she had been turning over in her mind during the last two days, in which her visit to Manor Combe had strengthened her. One of Lord St. Erme's daughters had been advised to spend a winter in Italy on account of her health. Her family could not conveniently accompany her ; and Mrs. Edgcombe now thought of undertaking the charge herself.

"It will be an occupation at all events," she said. "Laura St. Erme is a pleasant, sensible girl, but not too pleasant or sensible ; she won't put me in mind of any one ; and I shall not run the risk of growing too fond of her. The new scenes will, perhaps, put High Combe partially out of my mind ; and I shall do my duty in leaving

Walter and Sydney to settle themselves there, in their own fashion. I have no wish to act the part of that odious domineering mother who always oppresses the lovely, excellent, low-born wife, in a novel."

Miss Arnays approved the plan, and they discussed details till the carriage stopped at Tunstall. The bustle of the arrival shortened the farewells. Clemency's whole attention was given to her aunt, who was much overcome by the fatigue of the drive, and the parting from her friend.

She hardly knew when the last good-bye was spoken; but afterwards, when Miss Arnays was resting on the sofa, and she stood at the window looking out into the little street, where the traces of the carriage-wheels were still visible in the dust, she felt as if all the brightness and interest of her life had been borne away by those retreating wheels, and that she had turned over a new, blank page.

CHAPTER VI.

He soon hath found
Affections ground
Beyond time, place, and all mortality.
To hearts that cannot vary,
Absence is Presence, Time doth tarry.

ONE gray November afternoon, three months later, found Clemency sitting alone on the shore at Seaford, watching the tide creeping slowly up the high bank of shingle that ended the beach. She had taken her hat off, to let the soft sea wind cool her forehead, weary and aching with many anxious nights of watching beside her aunt's sick bed. Her eyes followed dreamily the motion of the lazy lead-coloured waves, as they advanced in slow curves, and broke and retreated from the bank, and her ear drank in, with a sense of satisfaction, the sweet sound of the water fretting and gurgling among the loose stones. Monotonous, grey sky, and dead, colourless expanse of sea, and the never-ending, mutual complaint of wave and shore, were all soothing influences to her that day.

She had come out with too-anxious and desponding a heart to bear any brightness ; but the grey calm, with its under-song of monotonous plaint, seemed made on purpose to answer to her mood. As she sat and looked without much thinking, now at the near view, now at the far-off misty meeting-point of sea and sky, she felt soothed and comforted, as a fretful, timid child is comforted by being allowed to hide its face in the soft dimness of its mother's or nurse's bosom.

Since their arrival at Seaford Miss Arnays had had a second attack of the illness from which she had suffered so much in the summer. The worst symptoms had been subdued, and Clemency and Rolla tried hard to persuade themselves, that all danger was over ; but as week followed week without any marked improvement in Miss Arnays' state of health, an unacknowledged foreboding of coming sorrow grew to be more and more constantly present to Clemency's mind. She would not ask herself what it was that was coming—she would not acknowledge even to herself, what shade it was that hung over her, as she sat musing thus on the bank ; but the future lay before her, dim, shapeless, and colourless as the sky-line on which her eyes oftenest rested. She busied herself most with regretful recollections of the past, wondering how she could have left

her aunt so often in the spring, and how she ever could have thought anything of much consequence but her health, and the prospect of keeping her for a long time with them. Her reverie was broken at last by feeling something wet and prickly, drawn across her forehead, and, looking up, she perceived her brother Rolla, seated on a heap of stones behind her, amusing himself by trying, how close to her forehead he could let down a tangled piece of sea-weed, without disturbing her.

"It was you who moved your head," he said, when she looked at him; "I have dropped it twenty-three times before, and you were in such a brown study, you neither saw nor heard."

"You lazy boy, why did you leave Aunt Bessie? Surely I have not been out more than my hour!"

"No; but Arthur Yonge gave me a broad hint that he wanted to speak to Aunt Bessie alone; and as he has only come for three days, I thought I ought to humour him. Besides, I have something for you—the letter from Mrs. Edgcombe that you have been expecting all the week."

"Yes, I thought she would write, to tell me about the wedding last Saturday. Let me see."

Rolla shifted his place, after relinquishing the letter, from the stone-heap above his sister's seat, to a position

on the bank below, from which, stretched at ease, with chin between his two hands, he could conveniently watch Clemency's face as she read. There was no curious or inquisitive expression in the quiet brown eyes he fixed on her face, only the deliberate, considering look with which he was accustomed to regard everything that came within their ken.

There was much resemblance of feature between the brother and sister, and yet strangers seldom discovered any likeness, and were apt to imagine the difference of age between them, greater than it was. Rolla's face was almost too smooth, and beautiful, and placid-tempered for his seventeen years; and Clemency, during the last few months, had grown to look a little older than she really was, her eager blue eyes, quickly coming and going smiles, and ever-varying expression, in which, every shade of thought, or change of mood might be read, were apt to impress slow-natured people uncomfortably. She was held to be too clever and satirical for a pleasant companion, by many who had not penetration to perceive the far less pitiful judgment that lay under the soft glance of Rolla's velvet-brown eyes, or the scorn that often lurked, in the quiet smile on his mouth.

Clemency was a long time reading her letter; when

she looked up from it, Rolla had turned his attention to a young crab, whose efforts to escape down the bank to the sea, he was amusing himself by circumventing.

"Come and look at this creature, Clem, the cunning of it. It watches my hands, out of those ridiculous black beads of eyes in the middle of its back, and sets itself to outwit me. What important appointment has it, I wonder, down among the shingle there, that it's in such a hurry to be off? How I wish I could get into it, to have a look through those black beads into crab-world. It's a great bore to think that we're shut up in our bodies, and can't get beyond them anyhow."

"You would not enlarge your sphere much if you got into the crab, I fancy."

"Not if I stayed there. If one is to be one thing, I don't feel much doubt that it is best to be a man, and look about in man-world. I rely on my old friend Sandy's saying, 'There's nought sae queer as folk.' I hope Sandy is working at the Red Hill pits still, for I look forward to seeing him more than anything else in going back to Tunstall. I shall spend half my time at the pits, chatting with the men and going up and down."

"But, Rolla, I do hope you don't mean to be idle; our father will be so annoyed if you are. It makes my heart sink sometimes to hear you talk as if you were

going to settle at home for nothing in the world but your own amusement."

"On the contrary, you ought to applaud me for being philosophical enough to find any amusement in Tunstall. Let me tell you there are not many people who could. I think I excel most people in setting dulness at defiance wherever I am. Even shut up in the counting-house with no one but my father and old Stubbs to watch, I shall make some amusing observations, I have no doubt. 'Folk should not be sae queer' if they expect me to do anything but observe them. I ask nothing of the world but to go its own way and let me look on."

"I don't understand you, Rolla. I often wish, as you did about the crab, that I could get inside your mind and look round."

"One understands you well enough by the outside, my poor old Clem—good old Clem, I mean. There, go, sidelong creature, and communicate to your friends under the waves the observations you have made on me. I've done with you for to-day. Now for Mrs. Edgcombe's letter. I'm going to rest my head on the softest corner of your shawl, and shut my eyes, that I may not be tempted to count how many private bits you skip in the reading."

"You saucy boy ; as if I were obliged to read any of it to you. I don't know that I ought."

"As you like ; I believe I could almost read it to you. I can divine easily enough what Mrs. Edgecombe's feelings must have been when she heard the exhortation about 'just cause or impediment,' and did *not* forbid the banns between her son and Sydney. All I want really to know is, whether or not Mrs. George Serle has survived the honour of entertaining Lord St. Erme at breakfast. If she has, it will be pleasant to hear her description of the event afterwards. Can she manage to make her children call him uncle anyhow ? Let me see, he is their aunt's uncle in law. Some relationship, surely, might be made out of that. Well, well, it would have been almost as bad at the Red House, Clem ; let us hide our burning faces in the shingle, and be thankful that such temptation was not put in our way."

"Mrs. Edgecombe does not mention Mrs. George Serle, and though the letter is a long one, as you see, there is after all very little real description of the wedding. She only says here, 'As Walter had taken the ordering of every article of Sydney's dress on himself, it was elegant and suitable ; she looked pretty, but very pale and frightened. Walter himself was more nervous than, I think, a bridegroom has a right to be ;

but I suppose it is an awkward situation at all times for both parties, and to the principal actors on Saturday was made more than ordinarily trying by the conviction they must have had that the spectators were not, for the most part, sympathising ones. Those two tall forward Miss Humphreys were at church ; they came in late, and would force themselves into a conspicuous place, from pique, I suppose, at not having been regularly invited. Sydney passed them in the aisle without speaking, but she turned so pale, I thought the silly little thing would have fainted outright. In a month or two she will know how to turn the cold shoulder to old friends without so much emotion.' There, I assure you, that is every bit of description or satire Mrs. Edgecombe indulges me with ; all the rest of the sheet is filled with an account of her own plans. She is going to Cannes with one of the St. Erme nieces, who is ordered abroad for the winter ; they start for Paris to-day."

"The king is dead—long live the king ! So we shall have Sydney Serle reigning in old High Combe this winter ; it will be good to watch it. I wonder whether she will ever again peep up from under her eyelashes, with the scared look in her eyes I used to bring there in old times by pretending I had informed Mrs. George of some monstrous piece of mischief we had

perpetrated together. She was better fun than you, Clem, when she was a girl; it was so easy to coax her into scrapes, and frighten her out of her wits about them afterwards. It won't be exactly an *ass* in a lion's skin we shall do homage before; it will be a *hare*. If she manages to fill the skin decently, so as to keep it from trailing in the dust, I shall begin to think there is really no difference except skin between hares and lions."

"I don't see why the change of circumstances should alter her so much. She will not have to stand, or as you say, reign alone. She will always have her husband to direct and help her. You seem to forget his existence."

"No, I don't; but I have my own opinion about him. I don't commit myself to it, for it is founded on very slight grounds; no one speaks rationally about him, as far as I can make out, but Arthur Yonge, and he has never favoured me with more than one or two snappish answers to all my questions; enough to show his opinion, however."

"It is a mistaken one," Clemency answered, quickly; "Arthur always has been prejudiced against Colonel Edgecombe; I don't know why."

"Don't you? I do. Now, Clem, don't turn away from me; it can't be time to go in yet; and I'm just begin-

ning to be comfortable. I'll leave off talking, if you like. I'd just as soon look about me. What a delicious rose-tint has crept over the grey sky and sea since we began to talk!—it's the reflection of the sunset behind; the clouds have cleared away, I suppose; but we won't turn round—the reflection is enough. Look at that patch of wet sand down below, it has turned in this moment to a large opal, every colour of the rainbow in it, and the frothy edges of the ripples pink as roses. I don't know how you feel, but I should like to lie here for a thousand years, and look and look, and let the waves creep over me, and the coral insects, if there are any about here, turn me into a rock. Then the waves would rave and fret against me for ever, and I should look down in a grand calm, and laugh at them."

"As you like. I have not eaten lotus buds, and have no wish to sit for ever 'between the sun and moon upon the shore.' I shall go home and make tea for Aunt Bessie and Arthur Yonge; they must have talked out all their secrets by this time."

The conversation had been of a much graver character between Arthur Yonge and Miss Arnays. Clemency did not interrupt it too soon, for each had said all they wanted to say; but there was a slight embarrassment on their countenances as she entered, which gave her

the uncomfortable feeling that some topic concerning herself had been discussed between them.

Clemency had looked forward to Arthur Yonge's visit before he came; thinking that his presence would help to bring back the cheerfulness of old times before her aunt began to be ill, and before she had spent so much of her time at High Combe; but when he arrived, she had not been able to welcome him quite as cordially as her aunt and Rolla did. His manner to her had altered; the old perfectly unrestrained happy intimacy had ceased between them, and she did not think the anxious devotion that now marked Arthur's manner to her at all a good substitute for it; and now that her mind was less pre-occupied than it had been in the summer, she could not help perceiving the change. It was precisely what she did not want, and just then could not bear patiently. It was a manner that sat very ill on Arthur Yonge, she thought, and she could not help being provoked and feeling almost angry with him for depriving her of the comfort of the old, familiar, pleasant friendship, just when, in her self-distrust and loneliness, she wanted its support. She was pained for his pain, when she saw she had grieved him by a little pettish speech, or by keeping out of his way when he wanted to walk or talk with her: yet something always held her back

when she was inclined to show her contrition. They seemed hopelessly at cross purposes with each other ; their only happy times together were when they were both too much occupied with care for Aunt Bessie, and efforts to make her tedious hours pass pleasantly, to think either of themselves or of each other.

The last Sunday of Arthur's stay was one of these days. In the morning he stayed and read the service to Aunt Bessie, whilst Rolla and Clemency went to church; and in the afternoon, though Miss Arnays was in reality rather less well than usual, she would not be denied having the company of all her three children, as she called them, that she might recall the old times of Sunday-afternoon lessons, when they had all stood round and said hymns and collects to her. She did not make it an occasion of any serious advice, or solemn appeal to any one of them : it was not her way ; but she found the places in the prayer-books, and the old favourite hymns, with her trembling fingers, and handed them, as she had been used to do, to one and another to read ; and smiled the old, peaceful, believing smile, when Rolla tried to puzzle her as of old with difficult questions ; and lay back listening to the scripture words with that far-off look in her eyes, which Arthur had been used to say made them all feel so real to him, as if she saw some-

thing answering to the words that was hidden from their eyes. She would be left alone in the evening; they all then went to the evening service, and when they came out of church the air was so pleasant, and the clear November moon was shining so brightly on the sea, that Rolla insisted on their going round by the beach instead of taking the short cut home. When they had nearly reached the house Arthur begged Clemency to take one more turn with him before going in.

"You can't expect many more such evenings," he urged, "and it is my last night; I leave early to-morrow."

"I had rather go in," Clemency answered; but she turned back and walked with him, just from the old habit of doing what he told her.

"Moonlight walks in November are out of season, certainly," Arthur said; "we never did such a thing at Tunstall. Next Sunday at this time, when I am watching the white mist creeping up the Combe valley, I shall hardly believe I proposed a late walk to you. I hope you are not cold."

"Oh, no, it is not that; only I don't like being so long absent from home."

"Aunt Bessie knew I was going to ask you to stay after church was over. I consulted her, and she agreed with me that it might be well for you and me to have

an explanatory talk before I go. When we meet again it may be in different circumstances, and I may not again have the right to speak freely to you."

"Oh, Arthur, what do you mean?"

"More than I can explain clearly in this cold, moonlight walk. You will find out by degrees when you get back to Tunstall. I am afraid your father does not like me. A sort of rivalry has sprung up between several of the old-established ironmasters and my partner, Mr. Wilson, and jealousy at the unexpected success of my invention, lies at the root of it. Your father is one of the most violent against us; he cannot believe that we owe our sudden prosperity entirely to fair means. I shall do all in my power to secure that there shall never be the least want of friendliness in any act of ours towards him, whatever he may say or do against us; but I am afraid he will never forgive us for succeeding in an attempt in which he failed. His interests must suffer more or less through our success; and I fear that he will always take me for a personal enemy, when I am only doing my duty to my partner. You may think I ought not to trouble you with all this. It is strange talk, certainly, to bring you out into the moonlight to hear."

"I am very glad you have told me," Clemency said,

considerably relieved at the turn the conversation had taken ; " I should have found it very hard if I had had to see my oldest friend drift away from me, without a word of explanation from him."

" I want the explanation to be complete. If you are to hear me spoken against constantly, and to be kept out of my way, I must at least have the consolation of knowing that you understand me thoroughly, and know what my thoughts towards you are all the time ; and so, though I have no expectation that what I say will have the smallest present result, I have determined to tell you that I love you—that I have loved you ever since I knew you, I think ; and that I never can, and never shall, leave off loving you as long as I live."

" Oh, Arthur, I am sorry—"

" Yes ; I knew you would say that. I know it will be no pleasure to you now, only pain ; but for all that I think it best for you to know. I don't want a single kinder look or word than you have been used to give me, in return. I only want you to let the fact of my love enter your mind. I only want you to be sure that under any circumstances in which you may be placed, at all times of your life, there will be, as long as I live, one person in the world who loves you above all others, and who would die to serve you."

"But I don't deserve that you should think of me so. I don't love you, Arthur ; not in that way, I mean. If you only knew what has been passing in my mind while you have been caring for me—I am afraid I ought to tell you."

"No, there is no need. You cannot tell me anything about yourself that I don't know. Nothing can alter me. It is not any supposed love of yours to me that I love ; it is you, yourself. If you could change to be anything but what you are, I don't know how it would be then ; I think it would be all over with me ; I should be so lost and lonely. As long as you are the Clemency Franklyn I have known from my childhood, I shall go on loving you, whatever your feelings may be to me or others."

They took a turn in silence after Arthur said this. Clemency was crying quietly under her veil, but she tried to let the tears fall unobserved.

"You must not be angry with me," Arthur said, at last. "I debated a long time whether I should speak to you or not, and I came to the conclusion that truth was always best to know."

"I am not angry ; I am humbled and ashamed. I feel now as if I had injured you as well as myself. I must be very wrong somehow, to have let a person love

me whom I do not love, and to have learned to care for one who was not thinking of me. I must have very little dignity, or want something that women ought to have."

"Will you believe me, that you are not to blame in either case," Arthur said, gently. "I will not say who was to blame. I can't forgive him ever; but I won't speak of him. As for you,—you had heard his praises for years; he came among us like the hero of one of our old tales; he was always seeking you—it would not have been you, if you had not believed in him, and given him credit for being as superior to other people as he had been represented to you. I don't say I have not been miserably jealous often; but there have been times when I have felt that I admired you more than ever, for wanting some one worthier than I, to love. Do you remember a line in Emerson's 'Each and All,' we used to admire when we first read it together—

Had I a lover that was noble and free,
I would he were nobler than to love me?"

"Now I know more about it. I don't think anyone could really feel that."

"Not always; but there are moments when one has a glimpse of such a thought, though perhaps it is only when one has not quite given up hope. And mind, I

have not ; I shall struggle on till I come to be more like what you can love, and then I shall try again. If ever you hear of my doing anything that you approve, small or great, be sure that I thought of you in doing it. Say to yourself, he knows my thoughts better than anyone else can ever know them. Every spark of love, of truth, and of good that is in him, is cherished by his love for me. In the end, I think you will learn to love me ; at all events, I shall always love you, and I believe I hold most to that."

"But you will change, Arthur. Forgive me for saying that ; but I feel so much older than you to-night. I know now that people do change ; people, perhaps, who would not believe it of themselves. I can never have the same sort of happy confidence again. That is why I cannot promise even to try to think of you as you wish. I shall never be able to give you what would be worth having. I shall never trust perfectly again."

"Ah ! that is the real harm ; there is the worst wrong that has been done to you."

"Yes, I have grown suspicious ; at least, of professions of liking to myself. They sound like a mockery to me now. I know it is a morbid feeling, and that you must blame me for having it."

"No more than if you had shown me a wound some one had given you. I only long to see it healed, and wish I had the power. I know I must wait a long time ; but I am not discouraged."

"You ought to be, Arthur. I shall blame myself to-morrow for not having spoken more decidedly. I am grateful to you, indeed I am, for caring so much for me ; but what I wish is, that we should always remain friends as we used to be, and nothing more."

"I am the same friend to you I always was ; and the something more shall never interfere with any act of friendship you may require from me. This is the turn home ; I won't keep you out any longer ; thank you for letting me say so much."

"I am sure you have no reason to thank me. I have been very unkind to you lately. I think because I felt that you knew more of what had happened to me this year than anyone else did, and I was vexed that you should know. I hope you will forgive me for being so unjust ; and Arthur, Aunt Bessie wished to sit up later than usual because it was your last night ; you will not let her see that I have made you unhappy ?"

"Certainly not ; besides, you have not made me unhappy. You have not said anything I was not prepared for."

If Aunt Bessie did gather any hint of the result of the conversation from the faces of the party that gathered round the supper-table, Clemency's swollen eyelids had to answer for it, for Arthur kept up a lively conversation with herself and Rolla, till the time came for wishing good-night.

The taking leave of Aunt Bessie, was by far the most trying event of the day to Arthur. He knew and she knew that it was in all probability a last farewell, yet both were too considerate of the feelings of Clemency and Rolla, who were still buoying themselves up with uncertain hopes, to alarm them, by betraying that they had this conviction.

Arthur found a moment when Rolla and Clemency were talking together apart, to speak a word or two of fervent thanks for her kindness of so many years to him, the utmost experience of motherly love and tenderness his life had ever known.

She smiled a doubtful, tearful smile, as she took his strong, brown hand in the clasp of her weak, feverish fingers. "My dear, I have been wondering to-night while you were away, whether you have any of you cause to thank me. Whether, on the whole, from my weakness, and over-indulgence, and mistakes, I have not done you more harm than good, and brought

more pain than blessing into your lives. I am very much disposed to think it is so when I hear Rolla talk, and now and then you too, Arthur, in a way which shows me what a different crop of fruit the seeds I sowed in your minds have brought forth, from what I expected ; or when I look into your face, or Clemency's, and see traces of pain there, which might not have been if I had left you each in your own right homes, and not had you so much with me. Nay, dear, don't contradict me, the thought is not so painful to me now as it once was. I no longer think of going up to God with any beautiful work of my own to show him. I am content to lay my failures at his feet, and to put back into his strong hands, to make right, the work I have marred. He will make it right, and that is enough."

"You must let me thank you, however, Aunt Bessie," Arthur said, stooping down to kiss her forehead. "What would have become of me without you ? No son ever owed more to a mother than I do to you. As for that pain you speak of, even if it is never to change into anything else, I had rather have it than be content with a lower happiness than the one I am trying for. You must think of me as the person you have supremely benefited."

Arthur left early the next morning, and Clemency never knew that he and Aunt Bessie had exchanged those few farewell words. She would have envied Arthur if she had known, for Miss Arnays did not take even so much leave as this of anyone else.

The days slipped quietly on with her; each day stealing away a little of her strength; each day bringing the dread certainty of what was coming, closer to the hearts of the watchers, till at last it had to be taken in and lodged there.

By that time, Miss Arnays was too weak for more than the few words of thanks and the grateful smile, with which she requited every service to the very last.

Mr. and Mrs. Franklyn came to see her when the seeing could only be a few minutes, gazing now and then on a motionless breathing figure stretched on a bed. At length there came a day when the whispered thanks and the faint smile could no longer be given. The last love-tokens failed, for the loving spirit had passed out into the region where, however much love and service may be given to those left behind, there can be no audible or visible expression of it.

CHAPTER VII.

If two lives join, there is oft a scar,
They are one and one, with a shadowy third ;
One near one is too far.

Browning.

A YEAR and three months passed between Colonel Edgewcombe's marriage, and his mother's return to High Combe.

The continued ill-health of the niece of whom she had undertaken the charge, had furnished Mrs. Edgewcombe with good and sufficient reason for prolonging her residence abroad. Her letters to her son always contained affectionate assurances of her regret at their prolonged separation, yet he felt more or less all the time, that her absence was a sort of punishment inflicted on him in token of displeasure at his marriage. At first he was more angry than hurt, at her defection. He tried to put thoughts of her as far as possible from him, and to content himself with the new companionship he had gained. But as months slipped

away, the anger faded from his mind, and a very constant sense of loss and want, began to make itself felt. He discovered, that it had been more bearable to do without his mother for ten years in India, than for one at High Combe. The place was not itself without her. No day passed without some circumstance arising, to make him long for her advice or sympathy.

From his long residence abroad, he was less versed in country business, and less capable of understanding the intricacies of local politics, than became a man in his position. He constantly found himself giving offence or making blunders, just for want of the warning word or timely suggestion, she would have known so well how to speak.

He would have learned to act by himself in matters of business however; it was in leisure hours that he missed his mother most sorely. At the important hour when the post came in, he missed the eager interest, with which she had listened to the scraps of news he culled in his first hasty glance down the newspaper. He missed her coming round to his end of the table, and leaning her hand on his shoulder, and reading the page with him, if the paragraph concerned any old comrade or Indian hero—or touched any question of

Indian policy on which he had expressed an opinion. Sydney always thought he was out of humour, if he read the newspaper aloud at breakfast-time, and besides had such very vague views on geography, and such a slender memory for notable names, that the special interest of the news he imparted never dawned upon her. Most of all, Colonel Edgecombe missed his mother in the idle afternoon hour when he came in from his ride, and liked to lounge about the library, taking down one or other of his and her favourite old books from the shelves, dipping here and there, and reading aloud a line or a passage, which seemed (as chance readings so often do) to illustrate some event of the day, or recently discussed topic. It was strange, in that room, with one of the often-read volumes in his hand, to look up and miss the quick, understanding glance, and ready, apposite remark, that had rewarded him in former times for his literary discoveries.

"Had you not better sit down, if you are going to read to me, dear, and begin at the beginning of the book," Sydney said, once or twice, till he left off troubling her to listen to select passages.

In his walks and rides, too, he wanted a companion who could understand and share his great delight

in the scenery about Combe. Sydney had lived among it all her life, yet he found it so difficult to make her see what he wanted her to see, that he was sometimes driven to believe she must be partially blind.

"Is it that clump of purple beeches on the green hill-side, where the sun is shining, you want me to notice?" she would ask. "They look just as usual, don't they? Oh, yes, I *see* them quite well. The colour of the leaves reminds me of the old, dark, shot-silk Lizzie wears on rainy Sundays, but I can't say I ever admired it particularly." Or, "Don't ask me to come out just now, please, dear; I am in the middle of a row of bead-work. I don't care if the sun-set glow has faded out of the clouds before I come out. The sun sets every evening, you know, and the clouds always are reddish. Why need I look at them?"

The constant repetition of remarks like these, could not but have a wearying effect on the mind of a fastidious man, accustomed to the society of so cultivated a woman as the elder Mrs. Edgecombe. Yet Colonel Edgecombe tried as hard as he could, to shut his eyes to the amount of uncongeniality between himself and his wife, which they seemed to reveal. He was too loyal-hearted, to reckon up strictly, the deficiencies of the woman he had chosen, and who had given him her

love. He would gradually have accustomed himself to live his mental life alone, and have found sufficient community of interest in the cares, and pleasures, and pains, of the outward life they shared, if only no darker cloud than this want of intellectual sympathy, had arisen between them. That there was another cause of misunderstanding, Sydney, who did not recognise the mental one, was well aware. She could have traced its first appearance, and its slow growth, better than her husband. The fault of which she had been guilty, in concealing from her husband her broken engagement with Mr. Humphreys, was the "rift within the lute," which slowly widening in its consequences, threatened to destroy the harmony of their married life. Sydney often thought with wonder, of the innumerable difficulties in which her unfortunate acceptance of Mr. Humphreys had involved her. All the little equivocations, all the little acts of apparently incomprehensible self-will, which she knew were daily lowering her in her husband's estimation, had been forced upon her, by the necessity which she believed herself to lie under, of propitiating Lizzie, and avoiding offence to the three or four people who possessed her uncomfortable secret. During the first months after her marriage, she had often half-resolved to deliver herself from Lizzie's

exactions, and the Misses Humphreys' hardly-concealed insolence, by confessing all that had passed, to her husband. After all, she used now and then to say to herself, since she had never loved anyone but him, he could not be very angry; and then, just as she had quite made up her mind to speak to him, some chance remark of his, revealing a higher standard of honour than she quite understood, threw her back into her old dread of incurring his contempt. No tyranny of Lizzie's, no sneering look on Miss Humphreys' face, could be so hard to bear as hearing him apply such words in such tones to her conduct, as she had heard him use in contemning far less important lapses from truth, in other people.

Unhappily, her dread of losing his good opinion, had not the salutary effect of inducing stricter uprightness in word and action. It would have required a far steadier head, and more resolute heart, than hers, to walk in the path of concealment she had chosen, without getting involved in ever thickening webs of equivocation and deceit, and before long she had seen looks, and heard words, applied to (what she considered) unimportant acts of hers, which put the possibility of full confession for ever away from her. She did not understand that it was the discovery of an untruthful

nature in her, that turned her husband's heart away, and that no revelation of a past fault, could have displeased him so deeply. A confused sense of being harshly and unjustly judged, began to grow in her mind, embittering her thoughts of her husband, and excusing to herself her want of confidence in him.

She was not altogether wrong in her instinct, there was a want of understanding at the bottom of his judgment of her, of which she had a right to complain. Strong-willed men, who have never known what it is to live in fear of others, are always disposed to be hard on timid subservient women, in this matter of truth-speaking. They mete to them the same measure of blame which they themselves, to whom truth-speaking is as easy as breathing, would deserve, if they failed, and never know that by some women, in some circumstances, perfect openness can be attained only, through efforts that are almost heroic.

If Sydney could once have opened her heart to her husband, and pleaded in excuse her natural timidity, and the long course of domestic tyranny under which she had learned deceit, he would have pitied her, and strengthened her against her failing, and guarded her from temptation. Having no clue to understand her conduct, her ineffectual weak efforts to compass her

own ends by round-about ways, only irritated him, and the division between them widened every day.

Sydney was sitting in the library at High Combe one morning, meditating sadly on one of the innumerable social difficulties, in which her subservience to Lizzie and the Misses Humphreys involved her, when Colonel Edgecombe entered, with a joyful countenance, to tell her that he had just received a telegram from his mother, announcing her intention of being with them that evening.

"A day before I thought she could come," he said. "They must have travelled quickly, and crossed from Boulogne last night. My mother always was a famous traveller. I am glad she is coming to-day. Of course her rooms are ready for her?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose so; but is it not rather awkward her coming to-day? You know we have to go out this evening."

"*Have* to go out? What do you mean? I am not going anywhere, and I did not know you were. I told you before, I thought it just possible my mother might arrive to-day."

"It is that dinner-party at Mrs. Fowler's, Caroline Humphreys that was; it is her first dinner-party since she married, and I promised Jane Humphreys we

would both be there, she made such a point of it."

"My dear, how came you to promise such a thing? I never had the least intention of dining with Mr. and Mrs. Fowler. When the invitation came did we not settle to decline it? I was surprised they invited us, since you have never called on Mrs. Fowler since her marriage."

"Oh, but Walter, I did call. It was one day when I had taken Jane Humphreys out for a drive. We passed the house, and she made such a point of my going in; Caroline said something about asking us to her first dinner-party then, and I half-promised."

"But when the invitation came, you wrote and declined. So we agreed, at least."

"Well, I did not understand that you were so very determined. I left it uncertain. I thought, perhaps, you did not quite mean you would not go."

"My dear Sydney, will you never understand that I always do mean exactly what I say, neither more or less; why should there be two meanings about such an unimportant matter?"

"Oh, but it is not unimportant to the Fowlers'. They are so anxious to be visited by county people, and they reckon on us to introduce them."

"They miscalculate greatly, then. I don't at all like what I have seen and heard of Mr. Fowler, and I certainly shall not bolster up his doubtful respectability by going to eat his dinners. If his wife were really a friend of yours, it would be a different thing, but you don't, in your heart, like her any better than I do. I can't understand why you allow yourself to be such a slave to her and her domineering sister. It seems to be a last word with you that 'Jane Humphreys makes a point' of a thing."

"Oh, no ; but indeed, Walter, I don't know what I am to do about the party to-night. Poor Caroline's first dinner-party, and I have no doubt she has asked every one to meet us."

"You said you left it uncertain."

"In a way, uncertain, but I said enough to give them a right to be vexed if we don't go."

"Really, Sydney, one would think yes and no had no distinct meaning with you. It amounts to this, you have accepted an invitation that I particularly begged you to decline, and now you must get out of it as best you can. I certainly shall not go ; nor will you, unless you care more for vexing (as you say) the Fowlers', than for vexing me. It would be a want of proper respect for my mother, if we went out directly after she arrived."

"Oh, but it would not be *directly*, you know, dear, if she arrived in the afternoon, and we did not leave the house till nearly seven," Sydney answered, with the triumphantly truthful air she had a way of putting on, when she thought she was convicting her husband of a trifling inaccuracy.

Colonel Edgecombe walked to the other end of the room without making any reply, threw himself into a chair, and took up a book. Sydney went on listlessly looking out of the window, and sighing audibly now and then. Colonel Edgecombe's sharp speeches no longer pained her quite as much as they had done six months ago; she was unhappily getting used to them. The question of how to escape breaking her promise to Miss Humphreys, weighed most heavily on her mind. It would never do to give Jane Humphreys a new pretext for enlarging on that subject of broken promises, so often broached between them as it was. Sydney grew too restless to sit still as she imagined all that might be said. She left her seat, and strolled out into the conservatory, where she was fond of spending an hour, snipping off faded leaves and fancying herself busy. By-and-by Colonel Edgecombe heard an exclamation, and a sound of flower-pots falling, and hurrying in, he saw Sydney, with flushed face, trying vainly to push

aside some heavy orange-trees that occupied the lower shelves.

"Why did not you call me?" he asked. "They are far too heavy for you to move. Where do you wish to have them put?"

"I want to reach that bust of Miss Franklyn, and put it behind the orange-trees again. I can't think who can have brought it forward in such a conspicuous place, to attract every one's notice."

"That statuette of 'Clemency,' you mean. I moved it. It belongs to my mother, and she would not like to see it put out of sight."

"Well, I think it will strike everyone as very strange that there should be a portrait of Miss Franklyn stuck up in our conservatory."

"My dear Sydney, I have told you twenty times that it is not a portrait of Miss Franklyn. Can't you see that it is not in the least like her? I can't think why you persist in calling it so."

"There is her name on the back, however, plain for every one to read—'Clemency.' Miss Humphreys pointed it out to me, and said how strange it was, you should have her likeness put up instead of mine."

"Miss Humphreys is an abominable mischief-maker, and a"—fool, Colonel Edgecombe was going to add,

but he checked himself, and walked to the conservatory door instead.

Nothing, not even Sydney's equivocations, displeased him so much as a disposition she showed now and then to be suspicious and jealous of his former liking for Clemency Franklyn. Her little disparaging remarks on her supposed old rival, were more apt than anything else, to provoke the comparison, Colonel Edgecombe was always striving not to make. It was difficult while the ungenerous words were on Sydney's lips, not to recall the eager tones in which he had heard her vindicated in those very rooms, or the unsuspecting truthful face which her advocate had turned to him while pleading for her. He did not know that Sydney's frequent allusions to his supposed past love for Clemency were rather apologies to her own conscience than reproaches to him. As he stood at the conservatory door, looking out on the frost-bound garden, a vivid picture of the moment of his arrival at home two years before, came before him. He saw Clemency's face on that very spot, with the frank look of welcome on it, and his mother stretching out her arms to him from the sofa, and Sydney timidly shrinking from her side. What a beautiful thing he had then meant to make of his home-coming; then, he had his life before him to fashion;

and now—he would not pursue the thought further, he had told himself too often, that regrets were not only vain, but wrong and cowardly. Compunction for having been so near them, helped to soften his voice and manner, when he turned to speak to Sydney again.

“I am going out now,” he said. “I have to ride round by Hemsley Market, so I shall stop at the Combe station to wait for my mother, on my way back. You will go to meet her in the carriage, will you not? The drive to the station this fine day will do you good.”

“I can’t,” Sydney answered, pettishly; “for since you won’t let me go to the Fowlers’ to-night, I must see Lizzie, and send a message by her. I shall have to walk over to Manor Combe after luncheon.”

“As you please,” Colonel Edgecombe said, drily; and then he walked away.

And Sydney, after listening to his footsteps till she could hear them no longer, sank down on a low seat among the orange-trees, and covered her face with her hands. She would have given anything to run after him and tell him she was sorry to disoblige him; it was dreadful to her to live with a shadow of displeasure between her and those she loved; but the fear of saying too much, or bringing inconvenient questions on herself, always restrained her from making the first

advances towards reconciliation, and caused her to assume a pettish manner that was not natural to her.

"Oh, how unhappy I am," she said to herself. "It is worse than it used to be at Manor Combe. There I always had my father to take my part, and now I have no one."

After a time she roused herself, and went upstairs to prepare for her walk to Manor Combe.

CHAPTER VIII.

I am ashamed that women are so simple,
To offer war, where they should sue for peace.

Shakspeare.

THE household at Manor Combe had not improved either as to comfort or harmony, since Sydney had ceased to be a member of it.

Mrs. George Serle could not explain the cause to her own satisfaction ; but certainly the advantages she had expected to gain by having the house to herself, had not come to her. Whether it was that she had stretched her authority a little too far, in forcing her father and husband to acquiesce in Sydney's unworthy treatment of Mr. Humphreys, and so provoked a reaction in their minds against her, or whether the increased gloom of the house exceeded their powers of endurance, it was impossible to say, but it was certain that she found her skill in managing the male part of the family, less available than in former times. Even gentle, old Mr. Serle would sometimes reproach her with

having divided him from both his children; and George showed an increasing aversion to steady occupation, and evenings spent at home, which the plainest speaking of her mind, did not now hold in check.

Unfortunately for the prosperity of the Serle family, one or two circumstances had occurred shortly after Sydney's marriage, which had once more thrown George Serle among the companions, and given him an opportunity of resuming the pursuits, that had been the bane of his early life. He was in a temper of mind, when a temptation to break through the domestic constraint to which he had yielded for many years, came upon him with peculiar strength. He had felt some reproaches of conscience for the uncandid part his wife had persuaded him to act, towards John Humphreys and Colonel Edgecombe. He considered that both of these old friends of his, had been more or less deceived by himself and his family, and he felt lowered in his own estimation whenever he was in their presence.

On the next occasion, when an opportunity came to choose between yielding to his wife's advice or following his own inclination, he felt as if he was taking a step towards regaining his lost self-respect, when he persisted in keeping his own way, let her say what she

would against it. That his own way was now very manifestly the wrong one, did not trouble him so much as might have been expected. To go right by Lizzie's guidance, seemed to him just then almost more despicable than to go wrong by his own.

Lizzie now often had real cause to wear the anxious, aggrieved expression on her face, with which she had darkened the house, in times she would now have given worlds to recall.

Sydney was only partially acquainted with these new causes of anxiety from which her father and sister were suffering. When she was shown into the family sitting-room, after her brisk walk through the wood, she looked with a feeling of affection, very unlike her sentiments of former times, on the familiar objects round her. That room, with her father's old arm-chair in the fire-side corner, the little table standing near, to hold his spectacles and black velvet skull-cap, the full work-baskets and children's toys lying about, had, after all, a more truly home-like look, than she had ever been able to give any of the great rooms at High Combe, where nobody ever seemed to do anything. She took up a half-finished child's frock from Lizzie's work-basket, looked long at it, and laid it down tenderly at last. She had been interested about such

things herself in the spring, and then there had come a time of great suffering, followed by bitter disappointment. Since then Lizzie's long stories about her children had been much less wearisome to her than she had formerly found them, and a certain amount of sympathy and mutual understanding, had grown up between the two women. Lizzie was not in a sympathetic mood, however, that morning when she joined Sydney in the sitting-room. She had been very much put out in the course of the day, and she was not a person to suffer herself, without causing every one near her to take their share of the suffering.

The purport of Sydney's visit, when it was explained to her, recalled the worst of her grievances, and gave her the desired opportunity of launching forth into complaints.

"Not going to the Fowlers' this evening?" she exclaimed, throwing down a heap of clothes she had brought with her from the upper regions, into the basket, with an angry jerk Sydney remembered well. "Not going to the Fowlers'! Really, Sydney, you are the least reliable person I ever came across. I've done with depending on you to do a good turn for one, let one want it however much one may."

"But indeed, Lizzie, I cannot help this. I am glad

I have so good an excuse to-day, as Mrs. Edgecombe's sudden arrival gives me, for I don't think Walter would have let me go, under any circumstances."

"You should not have promised, then; it's far worse to promise, and then fail."

"Yes, yes; but it can't be helped; and I don't know why you are so angry, Lizzie. I thought you disliked Mr. Fowler, and were sorry that George had begun to be so intimate with him again."

Mrs. George looked up solemnly from the work-basket, whose contents she was now turning over.

"Sorry! I'll just speak out plainly what's on my mind, Sydney. We shall all have to be sorry for that, to the last day of our lives, and you have the intimacy to answer for. George gave it up, years ago, with all his other follies, when he married me, and it never would have been renewed if Colonel Edgecombe had not taken George with him that unlucky day last spring, to the Chester races. You stood out against me, you remember, for George's going. He met Fowler again that day, and invited him to Combe, and, as you know, the farm was never free from him and his grooms, and his horses, afterwards, till he established himself where he is now—no one knows how, unless it is with George's money."

"But, Lizzie, you should not speak as if the fault were all mine. They might have met all the same; and, at all events, Mr. Fowler's marriage with Caroline Humphreys, would have thrown him and George together."

"But Fowler would never have seen Caroline Humphreys if he had not paid us that unlucky visit. Besides, I don't believe he'd take all the trouble he does to draw George into his schemes, if he did not know he had a rich generous brother-in-law to fall back upon, if he gets into any difficulties. I believe he has settled here for nothing else but to make what use he can of George, and Vale Combe. He and George are always going about to races together now, and they have brought a horse down here that they have a joint interest in. It is just the old story over again. You know—but no, you were too young to know, all the misery it brought before. You should have seen your father's face last night, when Fowler and George were talking together. It would have made a heart of stone ache. I thought of what it says in the Bible about bringing grey hairs in sorrow to the grave; and I said to myself, 'His hairs are grey enough at all events: I wonder his children don't lay it to heart.'"

"Oh! Lizzie, how can you be so cruel?" Sydney

cried. "You know I never wish George to do anything to displease papa; and as for Walter, he will be very much annoyed, when he hears that George has entered into any sort of partnership with Mr. Fowler. I shall dread his hearing it."

"Then I think you might put yourself forward to remonstrate with George. I've spoken till I'm tired, and he minds me no more than if I were a chair or a table. I want you to take an opportunity of talking to him at the Fowlers' to-night. He is leaving Combe to-morrow, to be away a week; and I know his journey has some object that concerns these new transactions he is engaging in. I want you to try and persuade him not to go. If he once gets thoroughly mixed up with Fowler's set, and interested in their doings, there will be no holding him back. Tell him you are sure Colonel Edgcombe will disapprove. George is ready to take anyone's opinion but his wife's and his father's."

"I can speak strongly enough about Colonel Edgcombe's disapprobation," Sydney said, "but I shall not see George, I am afraid, before to-morrow. I told you we were not going to the Fowlers'. I can't persuade my husband. There's no use saying any more about it."

"Very well. But this I will say, that it's early days for you to begin to talk of not being able to persuade your husband to let you go to an evening party, when you have a particular reason for wishing it. I wonder what would have become of me if I'd begun to give way in every little trifle like that !"

"But, Lizzie, you know Colonel Edgecombe is a very different person from George."

"Yes, indeed, poor George has his faults; I'm the last person in the world to deny or make excuses for them ; it's a weakness I should be ashamed of ; but I should be sorry to accuse him of having such a tyrannical temper as Colonel Edgecombe, or of wanting to make a perfect slave of his wife."

"Oh ! Lizzie, I did not mean that. I did not say anything against Colonel Edgecombe's temper."

"If you don't mean us to think Colonel Edgecombe has a bad temper, you should not always make your fear of him, an excuse for not doing what one asks you. I lose patience with you, Sydney. You're never hearty one way or another. There is not one of you Serles who has as much resolution as a fly. You were fond enough of advising and plotting with George, when your advice was not wanted ; but now, when a word from you might save him, you won't take the trouble to

“speak it. Well, I’ve done my duty. I’ve talked and talked; and if your father’s heart is broken, and the poor dear children brought to disgrace and ruin, it won’t be my fault.”

Mrs. George, who had half risen in the vehemence of her exordium, sank down suddenly at its close, and sat rigid, with her two hands very tightly clasped on her lap, her hard, thin, upper lip trembling, and real tears for once brimming over the lids of her steely grey eyes. Exaggerated complaints and heartrending forebodings were too common on her lips, and had too often been brought forward on inadequate occasions, for any one who knew her to be much impressed by them. The tokens of real emotion were a different thing.

Sydney stood looking at Lizzie’s tears with the painful surprise one might feel, if one suddenly discovered that an accomplished actor on the stage, had really received the death-wound whose agony one thought he had been feigning.

“I will try to do the best I can, indeed I will,” she said, meekly, after a few minutes’ irresolution.

“It is for your own sake as much as mine,” Lizzie answered, slowly wiping the tears from her eyes. “You talk of Colonel Edgecombe being annoyed; but what would he feel, if Caroline Fowler were to be provoked

by your neglect, to talk of you as she might talk—or if your brother were to bring disgrace upon us all? He would wish he had never married you.”

“Sometimes I think, he wishes that now,” Sydney said, sadly. “Good-bye, Lizzie. I must make haste home, or Mrs. Edgecombe will get there before me, and that would never do.”

Lizzie followed her to the door.

“Now, don’t run, and tire yourself to death,” she said, almost kindly. “Really, Sydney, you’re such a poor-spirited creature I sometimes wish I had let you marry John Humphreys. He would not have been angry with you, if you had kept his mother waiting twenty times a day. He worshipped the very ground you trod on. Why, even now, when he drops in of an evening, he’ll sit and look at your empty seat for five minutes together without speaking, till I’m quite sorry for him. You might have done as you liked with him.”

“Good-bye; I wish you would not say such things,” Sydney answered, dropping her veil hastily, and hurrying on.

The afternoon was beginning to close in, and she walked quickly through the rapidly darkening woods, but the quick motion did little to dispel the painful

thoughts her interview with Lizzie had awakened. The last two or three sentences rankled most. Not that the faintest shadow of regret for her choice came near her. The sting of the words lay in the doubt of the strength of her husband's attachment they suggested. "He would not be so easily made angry if he really loved me; even Lizzie sees that," she said to herself. "I wonder whether it would be better if I were less easily frightened, and oftener took my own way; other women do, and I suppose their husbands love them." Oppressed by sad thoughts, she was not able to keep up the brisk pace at which she had started; and she emerged from the shade of the trees just in time to see the carriage that had brought Mrs. Edgecombe from the station, drive round to the stables from the front door. The certainty that her husband and his mother were already in the house, did not increase Sydney's inclination to enter. It was a chill dark evening, and she was very tired, yet she stayed a long time walking up and down the terrace before she could make up her mind to go in. The bright fires glowed through the wide windows, like kind faces inviting her in. She could see figures moving about the warm curtained rooms, and hear voices. It was her own stately home, where her husband was; the place where she had once longed to be as if it were

paradise, yet now she felt as if the gloom and clinging mist without, were better for her. She was not wanted inside, she said, and she thought how much more unhome-like than ever High Combe would be to her now. She knew how her husband and his mother would talk together—that bewildering clever talk she had heard from them before, full of allusions to books and people and places she had never even heard of, and how she should sit between them, feeling so small and ignorant and of little account. “He will be sorry he ever married you.” She repeated Lizzie’s words over and over again to herself, till she almost thought she should like to wander somewhere away into the mist, and leave the bright enticing home, to the two who were together in it now.

A harsh voice roused her from this thought, as she was almost unconsciously leaning over a little iron gate that led from the shrubbery into the outer court. It came from one of her servants, who was ordering a party of vagrants from the kitchen door. A little altercation followed, and Sydney, her attention now roused, watched the scene. The glow of the fire-light from the open door, fell on the faces of the mendicants—a scowling, down-looking man, a white-faced, weary woman, with two or three ragged children hanging at

her skirts. Sydney noticed the hungry expression in the haggard eyes the woman turned towards the light and warmth within the house, and the shudder with which she drew her thin shawl round her shoulders, when the servant, with a second angry assurance that they would get nothing by standing there, closed the door upon them, and they turned to go back into the darkness again. A sudden sense of fellowship with sorrow, such as she had never known in her life before, impelled Sydney to open the gate, and run after the forlorn party before the mist swallowed them up ; not to invite them to come back, and be warmed and fed under her roof—she was far too much in awe of her servants to venture on doing such an unusual thing,—but to slip half-a-crown into the woman's hand, and say, gently,—

“I am sorry for you ; I hope you'll be able to find shelter in the village at the foot of the hill. It is not far off ; the first turn to the right will take you there.”

Then she ran back, and effected an entrance into the house by a side door. The sight of that weary woman's face had startled her out of her discontent, and put the difference between inside a home and outside in quite a new light to her. Mrs. Edgecombe no longer seemed more formidable than the misty winter's night,

and the loneliness of out of doors. She was after all her husband's mother, for whose return he wished her to be glad.

When she entered the library, where Colonel Edgecombe and his mother were still standing by the fire, she was sufficiently lifted out of her usual embarrassing self-consciousness, to be able to come forward with a pretty eagerness of greeting, and a glow of real feeling on her face, that gave her husband a very agreeable surprise. He had often been disappointed in her reception of his friends. Her over-anxiety to please, gave a restraint, an air of insincerity to her speech and manner, which he had been lately very lynx-eyed to observe. To-day the open look and few words were just what he liked—all that was due, and yet not more than he could give his wife credit for really meaning. He came round to where Sydney was standing, and put his arm round her to draw her forward into the light, and as he glanced from her face to his mother's, his eyes said plainly enough—"After all, I have not made such a very great mistake, have I?"

Mrs. Edgecombe's critical glance, almost against her will, softened into one of approbation.

"I really think Sydney has grown," she said, in a complacent tone that rejoiced her son's heart. "She

surely used not to come up so nearly to your shoulder. Ah, I see now, it is the high bonnet ; but never mind, my dear, you look far better without your bonnet, and, yes—certainly have grown a little. I hardly hoped to find you looking so well. Walter's account of your illness last July, made me very anxious. It must have been a sad time for you, poor child, alone in London, so far from any of your friends. I wish I could have come to you."

Sydney ventured to give the hand Mrs. Edgecombe held out a quick affectionate squeeze. She would have died of fright almost, if Mrs. Edgecombe had come to her when she was ill ; and yet at that time her heart had yearned strangely towards the only person she had ever had a right to call mother.

"She is a pretty, gentle little thing, after all," Mrs. Edgecombe thought to herself. "I will forget all the gossip the St. Ermes have been telling me against her, and try to make the best of her."

Then some fresh thought started up in her mind ; she recommenced her confidential talk with her son, and Sydney stood silent between them, not minding the feeling of being left out of the conversation much, for her husband's arm was round her, yet driven, by lack of interest in what was going on, to let her thoughts

recur to the anxieties that had previously occupied her. Should she venture to go to the Fowlers, as Lizzie wished, she debated. Colonel Edgecombe was so happy talking to his mother, and seemed altogether so pleased and satisfied, that perhaps he would not take her persistence very much amiss. Once or twice before, when Lizzie's or Miss Humphrey's strong will had dragged her into carrying out some project, of which he had expressed strong disapproval beforehand, he had shown much less displeasure than she had expected, when the thing was done. He had spoken no sharp words, hardly given an angry look, only there had been something in his manner—was it disappointment?—was it indifference? Sydney had never quite understood—it was easier for her to bear than open opposition; but she acknowledged sadly to herself, that it put her farther away from him afterwards. Still, if Lizzie exacted this effort from her, the after-consequences must be borne somehow.

“My dear Sydney, what a very deep sigh!” Mrs. Edgecombe exclaimed. “Was it meant for chorus to Walter's laugh; or are you only tired of standing? Well, I agree with you, the rest of my adventures will keep very well till after dinner, and we have been standing an unconscionable time. If you will tell me

which rooms have been prepared for me, I will go upstairs."

Colonel Edgecombe took his mother to her own old rooms, which had never been inhabited since she left them, and Sydney followed, absorbed and silent.

"At all events she is very quiet and unassuming," Mrs. Edgecombe said, to comfort herself, when she was shut up with surroundings that mutely recalled so many baffled hopes and plans. "I have come back to be content. I have been 'eating my heart' all this year, punishing myself for having hoped too much;—now it is enough,—I will be wise and take what I can have. Ah, it was just here that Clemency Franklyn knelt, when she begged me to consent to the engagement. I see her face looking up, so tender, so noble. How she would have welcomed me if I had come home to her! How interested she would have been in all I had to tell! What a different air the whole house would have had! Well, well, if Walter is satisfied, why should not I be? But is he? I shall be most glad and thankful to find that he is genuinely happy and content; and yet I confess I shall not think as highly as I used to do, of his taste and understanding."

Did Mrs. Edgecombe value her son's happiness or her estimate of his taste most highly? She would have

said, and thoroughly believed that his happiness was the dearest thing in the world to her, and yet it was not precisely with pain that she discovered a cloud on his brow, and remarked an air of constraint in his manner of addressing his wife, when they assembled in the drawing-room before dinner.

"Sydney considers herself obliged to leave us this evening," he said, quietly, when, just as they were going in to dinner, a servant came to tell Sydney that the carriage was waiting at the door for her. Then he turned to take her cloak from her maid's hands and waited patiently, while Sydney, with flushed face and pleading eyes, stood irresolutely in the doorway, barring her mother-in-law's exit.

"I am so sorry, I hope you won't think it unkind in me to leave you ; if I could possibly have helped going—it is so very unfortunate."

"You will not lessen the misfortune by keeping Mrs. Fowler's dinner waiting, and my mother's," Colonel Edgecombe remarked at last, in the same cold, slightly sarcastic tone.

"And there is not the smallest need to make apologies to me, my dear," Mrs. Edgecombe said. "I am very sorry to lose your company, but Walter and I can take care of each other. You are quite right to keep your engagement."

Sydney felt somehow as if she were dismissed from their presence like a naughty child, whose pleadings for pardon were not worth attending to.

Colonel Edgecombe wrapt her cloak round her, took her to the carriage, and ascertained that the lamps were lighted, and the night not so misty as to make a drive along the broken Tunstall roads unsafe. His manner had been perfectly courteous and kind since Sydney had come to his dressing-room door and told him, with faltering lips, that she had quite made up her mind to go out that evening. He had not spoken one word of further remonstrance, even. Sydney's Vale Combe experience of methods of showing anger had been bewilderingly different. She tried to be satisfied and think that she had carried her point without doing much harm, but her heart was heavy during her drive, and her grudge against the Misses Humphreys stronger than ever. Oh, if only they had let her alone from the very first, she meditated; or if she could have foreseen the trouble that would follow, when she scribbled that little note to Mr. Humphreys, just to save herself from one of Lizzie's scoldings. If only she had not always so feared pain, perhaps so much pain would not have come to her.

No remark was made on Sydney's absence during the

greater part of the evening, either by Colonel Edgecombe or his mother. They had much to say to each other. When Mrs. Edgecombe had exhausted her store of news, her son began to consult her on some questions of local interest, on which his opinion had to be given, and to explain some undertakings in which he had lately engaged, with a view of reinstating the High Combe family in the influential position in the neighbourhood, which his father had allowed to slip away from them.

These were topics on which mother and son could be equally eloquent, and for a time Mrs. Edgecombe's interest was so absorbed, that other thoughts were put aside. It was not till they were about to separate for the night that an uneasy misgiving prompted her to say :

"I wish I had known that Sydney was going out to-night, in time to urge you to accompany her; it has been very delightful having you all to myself, but I am sorry she had to go alone."

"It was her own choice. I did not know she was going till five minutes before she came downstairs, and I should not have gone with her under any circumstances. I don't like the people at whose house she is dining."

"My dear Walter! Of course it is neither my wish

nor my business to interfere, but surely if people are not fit for you to visit, they are not fit company for your wife."

"I did not say anything about *fit to visit*, I said I did not like them. If Sydney does, I can't help it. You know I always was of the *laissez aller* order; I don't pretend to control people beyond a certain point. If wilful man must have his way, much more, wilful woman. I suppose one cannot expect a woman who possesses a greater variety of fashionable dresses than her neighbours, to resist taking every opportunity of demonstrating the fact."

"Now come, Walter, I cannot bear you to take that contemptuous tone in speaking about women. You know a great deal better, so it only sounds affected on your lips. Women who have been accustomed all their lives to wearing suitable dresses, care very little about them. A short time for being dazzled ought, perhaps, to be allowed to Sydney, and then she will settle down. While it lasts, I don't think you ought to let her go about by herself."

"Perhaps not. In London I took her everywhere most dutifully; it was very well at first, she seemed genuinely to enjoy herself, and I was happy to give her pleasure, but after a time her health and spirits flagged.

She would have been content to have been rational and quiet then, if she had been let alone. Unfortunately a very disagreeable friend of hers, a Miss Humphreys, contrived to thrust herself upon us for a long visit, during the last six weeks of the season. Neither Sydney nor I could endure staying at home with her, so we plunged into the most irrational dissipation in self-defence."

"Why in the world did you not get rid of her? Miss Humphreys! What! that tall, vulgar sister of the Hemsley surgeon? How could you do such an ill-judged thing as to invite her to your house? What an unfortunate friend for poor Sydney to choose to have to go out with her."

"I don't believe Sydney chose her any more than I did. She came; and when she had established herself in the house, she stayed. I did what I could in a polite way to show her she was not welcome, but as I could not spirit Sydney into seconding me, my efforts went for nothing."

"I wish, oh so much, that I had been there. I was uneasy all the spring, when I learned from your letters how much Sydney was going out, in her state of health. I wish I had come home and stopped it. Violet St. Erme tells me she did remonstrate."

"Very likely; but Sydney is hardly a free agent where Miss Humphreys is concerned. I did not observe at first how little of her own will she had, or I should have interfered oftener. Miss Humphreys, being a Hercules herself, thought of nothing but getting all the amusement she could, out of her London visit, and Sydney foolishly gratified her, at the expense of her own health, I fear. In self-excuse, I must say I did not know of half they did. It was a cold caught at a water-party where I was not present, that brought on poor Sydney's serious illness last July. Lady St. Erme had advised her not to join it, and of course could not refrain from the 'I told you,' with which people always visit imprudencies, when it is too late. I don't think Sydney has recovered her spirits, or been quite the same, since."

"No wonder. I feel very guilty myself, Walter; I ought to have been at home to take care of her, poor child."

"Well, we have you now, mother," Colonel Edgecombe said, affectionately; "and all will be well. I am afraid I was too proud and obstinate to write and tell you how much I was wanting you; but now you are here, I can say what a relief and comfort it is to have you again. The house looks like itself

once more, and I feel as if a load were taken off my mind."

The subject was not pursued further; but when the two parted for the night, they were both in happier spirits than they had known for many months.

Colonel Edgecombe considered that he had in a great measure made over the care of his wife, for which he began to think himself incompetent, to his mother, who had always hitherto proved herself able and willing to take up the burden of duties which he had been too ready, once or twice before, to abandon to her. She, on her side, was gratified by the implied change; it soothed her two strongest feelings, her love of rule and her love of her son. She began to think there might be compensations for her great disappointment, which she had not calculated on.

It was doubtless a terrible misfortune that her son should have married a wife in some respects unworthy of him, and that his eyes should be opening to her deficiencies; yet there was comfort in the thought that he had turned to her in his disappointment, and was looking to her for the sympathy and companionship his wife could not give him. She did not mean to put herself between him and his wife; she believed she could work honestly to bring them to a better under-

standing of each other, and help them to the happiness they certainly had not succeeded in finding for themselves. When it should be her doing—her work ; she would be content, she thought, to stand aside and contemplate it.

CHAPTER IX.

Die Zeit hat wunderbare Kraft,
Sie hilft selbst über die Leidenschaft ;
Denn sie nöthigt zur Prüfung der Dinge
Und zeigt, was halte und was springe.

Laybe.

"COME, Clemency, I'm sure there's nothing to be seen out of the window now ; you might turn round and talk to a fellow. I never knew such a house as this, for sulks and silence," said Rolla Franklyn from the depths of a comfortable arm-chair in front of a great fire in the dining-room at the Red House, to Clemency, who was standing in the window, taking a last look out at the curling wreaths of mist outside, before she drew the heavy red curtains across the panes.

"You have been asleep till this minute, you lazy fellow, so don't pretend you have wanted me," she said, coming forward.

"Not asleep, only pretending ;—to uphold my glorious

character for incorrigible laziness, before my father. Did you not see that he was walking up and down, waiting to pounce on me if I so much as winked an eyelid. I tired him out; he's gone off, convinced at last that I'm not worth the trouble of scolding."

"Oh! Rolla; for shame. I thought it was provoking enough, for you to sleep while papa was waiting about the room to speak to you; but if you knew——"

"It was for his own sake as much as mine; to save him from wasting any more eloquent words; he has exerted his lungs enough already on me this misty day. Far better for him to rest now and let me have my turn by talking to you."

"What have you done to deserve lecturing to-day, Rolla?"

"I'll show you. I ran back and rescued one letter out of the office waste-paper basket, for it really is, though perhaps I ought not to say it, a great deal too clever to be lost. I wish my father had been content to tear the papers straight across, instead of jaggling the edges;—now observe. Your good sense will enable you to understand at a glance all that happened. Stubbs called out in the very middle of the afternoon,—my father obliged to have recourse to me to write letters for him—the fog having got into his brains he dictates

slowly,—I naturally fill up the pauses by illustrating along the edges of the page. Now look at this letter to a Moscow merchant; would it not have edified the worthy man, if my father had let me send it. Here's illustration the first—the writing of the letter; my father standing upright against the chimney-piece, very stiff and grave, dictating; I, sitting at the writing-table,—well knocked-off likenesses of both, I flatter myself. Second, the ship that takes the letter in peril from an iceberg, with a polar bear on it. Third, post-man taking the letter across a lonely country to Russian merchant's house, pursued by wolves. Fourth, arrival of the letter at Russian merchant's—handsome old fellow—pretty daughter looking over his shoulder while he reads. If that delicate piece of flattery would not have induced him to make a good bargain, his head must be harder than his iron."

"Pray, how many letters did you spoil in this way?"

"I *ornamented* five or six; one, where mention was made of Red Hill ironstone, had a capital little picture of the mine, with old Evan sitting on the corfe, just emerging from the pit's mouth, shading his eyes with his hands from the light. I never did anything better in my life, and you should have seen my father's look of disgust at it; if he had detected me in a design for

poisoning all his correspondents, or blowing them up with gunpowder, I don't think he would have been half as horror-struck, it would have seemed more rational to him. Really his want of appreciation of art is very distressing; what can be done about it?"

"What can be done about you, I should say, in despair, Rolla, if I did not know that you are not really, at the bottom of your heart, as indifferent as you pretend to be? I think your conscience reproaches you sometimes, for being nothing better than a puzzle and plague instead of a help to papa, just now when he has so many anxieties."

"You flatter yourself, my poor Clem. I content myself with hoping, that he finds the puzzle of my character as interesting as I do his. I ponder over his little methodical dodges for making work more tiresome than it need be with quite as much amazement as he watches my devices for extracting a little amusement out of it. In fact, we occupy ourselves so unceasingly with each other's doings, that we shall end by being the most devoted father and son in England."

"I wish the end was come, for meanwhile——"

"I get so many lectures in the daytime that I am principled, as Mrs. Franklyn says, against listening to any at night. I called you from the window to tell

you something that you'll like very much to hear ; will you hear it, or shall I go to sleep again ?”

“Tell me by all means.”

“I have seen two friends of yours to-day ; stay, I'm not sure that you don't now consider one an enemy, and I've my doubts about the friendship of the other, so we'll say an enemy and a friend. You shall guess who they are, and we will quarrel about which is which, afterwards.”

“Where did you see them ? You must tell me something to guess by.”

“I stayed at the office after everyone else had gone, to re-write these letters, and as it was too late for the Tunstall post when I had done, I, impelled by a sense of filial duty which deserves to be mentioned in history, of my own accord walked to the Combe Valley Station, where the box is emptied an hour later. On the station platform, a tall lady hurried up and shook hands with such exclamations of pleasure at seeing me, and looked into my face—well, with such evident admiration, that I thought her a discerning person, till I discovered that my sole merit consisted in being like you, and that all the eagerness was to know how you were, and when she could see you. Who was it, friend or enemy ?”

"Mrs. Edgecombe—has she come back? You actually saw her?"

"Friend or enemy?"

"How can you ask?"

"I can; your face is two shades graver since you mentioned her name. Friends are to sharpen the countenance, not sadden it, according to Solomon."

"You are rather too bad with your face-reading, Rolla. I love Mrs. Edgecombe dearly, you know, and I am glad she has come back, though perhaps there may be a little pain in thinking that I shall not be able to see her as freely as I used to do when Aunt Bessie was here."

"Mrs. Edgecombe is very full of you. I was to give you a message about a basket of rare flowers, that she had brought in her hand all the way from Cannes for you. She forgot to take it out of the carriage at the last station, and it's being whisked off to Edinburgh now; so, much good will it do you."

"I am just as much obliged. Would any one else in the world have taken so much trouble for me?"

"Hum! That question naturally suggests my second friend or enemy. When Mrs. Edgecombe had been swept away by a whirlwind of obsequious porters, I posted my letters, and to get back into the Tunstall

Road, I had to go down the steep wooden steps by the bridge. They were wet and slippery, and a tottering old fellow, with an enormous box on his back, was in my way. I was just going gently to push him aside, for he took five minutes to each step, when a gentleman behind me laid hands on the old man's burden, shouldered it himself, and ran down with it to the bottom. I could not see his face, but I said to myself, there's only one man in Tunstall who would take exactly that method of clearing the way. He was waiting at the bottom of the steps with the trunk when I got down, and he gave me an obstinate little nod which meant, 'I am not going to let you enter into any conversation with me.' I followed him all the way to Tunstall, telling him every cram I could think of, to make him speak; that we were several of us dying in the plague; that you were engaged to be married to a Siberian miner of fabulous wealth, and were to leave your native land in the course of a month, for ever; that I was in such a state of irritation at his absurdity, that I should turn aside and drown myself in the canal. But no, not a word could I drag out of him, only a squeeze of my shoulder when we parted at the turn of the road. He did not trouble himself to ask after you. Friend or enemy?"

"Arthur Yonge! Excellent friend! He would not countenance your disobedience to papa, by letting you draw him into conversation."

"And you are too dutiful to take the slightest interest in a person, your father has a prejudice against. Let him be ever such an old friend, ever such a good fellow, away he must go out of your head at the word of command. I hate such notions of duty; I'm not made after that pattern."

"Nor I."

"Then why don't you help me to stick up for Arthur Yonge? He used to be more your friend than mine in old times."

"As if he wanted either you or me to stand up for him now, when he is more looked up to by rich and poor than any man of his age in the neighbourhood, and when every one is talking of his extraordinary talent and good fortune."

"There it is; you are echoing Mrs. Franklyn, bringing up his cleverness and good fortune against him, as if they were crimes. She seems to think he ought to make no use of his discovery, and try to be unfortunate, to keep us in countenance. Some people have wonderfully grand notions of the sacrifices which their neighbours should make for them. It would seem

quite a simple thing to Mrs. Franklyn, that the main object of Arthur's life should be to prevent his partner from extending his business so as to injure Mr. Franklyn—anything less than that is black ingratitude. Such a woman's idea of how business could go on!"

"At all events, it is not mine, Rolla. If I do feel that Arthur's sudden prosperity does put him a little away from us, it is only because I always find it so much easier to 'stick up,' as you say, for unlucky people than for prosperous ones. I say to myself, while everyone is praising him, he does not want us."

"Then you do him a cruel injustice, that's all I can say, and show a mean spirit. You used not to be so ready to distrust your friends."

"No, I used not—perhaps it is a wrong feeling—I don't want to go to the bottom of it now. On one point, however, I'm sure I'm right, Rolla. Whatever we feel, you and I ought to avoid vexing papa, by openly showing sympathy with the people he looks upon as enemies. Why should you always be introducing Arthur Yonge's or Mr. Wilson's name in the conversation, and bringing up every little thing you can think of in their praise?"

"For the same reason that I like to stand throwing stones into a brook; it's such fun to see the ripples of disturbance pass over all your faces; and the conversational stones come so provokingly ready to hand that I can't bear to miss an opportunity of launching one. Besides, I mean what I say; in all the vexed questions that have arisen, the Wilsons have been right and we wrong. They were right in the concessions they made at the time of the strike, and it was we who were obstinate and wrong-headed. Arthur is the mainspring of everything done there; like a good general, he understands the people he has to deal with, and can take in more interests than his own individual one, and make them work together. We are always suspecting, and hesitating, and acting at the wrong time, grudging where we ought to be liberal, and lavishing for the wrong ends. If I were older—but no, I should only vex my father all the more; far better for me to occupy my mind with drawing little pictures."

"Yes, I knew it was not all thoughtlessness," Clemency said.

She was now kneeling by the side of the arm-chair in which Rolla was lolling, and putting back with her fingers the thick mass of bright hair that fell over his brow; she looked anxiously and fondly into his face.

"I can understand that it is very annoying to you, to be always on the losing side,—when you fancy you know it is the wrong one, too."

"Is it not annoying to you?"

"No, I have a woman's predilection for the losing side. I think you can hardly imagine how much easier it is to me to get on here, since I have had a glimpse of the anxieties that lie under an outside show of prosperity. Mrs. Franklyn has grown loveable to me, since I have seen how anxiously she watches papa's face when the letters come in. Besides, I have a great hope, which makes the petty grievances I used to chafe against quite bearable; you will think it a strange one."

"What is it?"

"That we shall one day be really ruined. Then I think we shall all begin to find each other out, and be comfortable together; we shall get rid of the Red House, and the constant struggle to seem richer than we are, and the petty ambitions and worries that leave us no time for really living. I shall be a good elder daughter to Mrs. Franklyn, when she and I are thinking of nothing so much as how we can clothe and teach the little children, and you will rouse up suddenly and show my father what you are worth."

"Shall I? It will have to be a very complete,

earnest ruin to satisfy me. If we were reduced, he and I, to going down into the Combe pits, side by side, with old Evan, now, it would be a thoroughly new experience that I should have no objection to try; but I'm afraid your feminine imagination goes no further than a small house in Tunstall, and a dingy office, where my father and I are to carry on the old work in a small way. That castle in the air I vehemently protest against, unless you also provide in the background some *Deus ex machina*—Arthur Yonge, let us say, who is to step in at the right moment, marry you, and lift us all into lazy prosperity again."

"No, no, no. What would be the use of falling? We won't be ignominiously stuck up again, like nine-pins, by anyone. I vehemently protest against your end to my story, Rolla. I shall really get to dislike Arthur Yonge, if you are always holding him over our heads in such a humiliating way."

Rolla turned round to look full in Clemency's face, and laughed.

"What a telling conversational stone I have thrown there; what a delicious splash it made, and now the ripples,—no, you can't stop them, they have gone up to your hair. There's no use denying it, my dear, I can always put you up about Arthur Yonge now."

"Or anyone else about whom you choose to talk nonsense."

"Come, don't turn stately ; don't visit it on him, poor fellow, when you see him this evening."

"What do you mean ?"

"Ah ! I have made a mull. I did not intend you to know, but I found out this morning that Arthur Yonge is to be at the Fowlers' to-night. You are going instead of Mrs. Franklyn, are not you, or is her cold better ?"

"I am going—at least—does papa know that Arthur Yonge is to be there ?"

"If I were to be of the party, I should hope not. I should so like to see his face when they met."

"Papa went into the study, I think. Well, good-bye ! If I do go to the Fowlers', it's time to dress ; if not, I'll soon be back again."

"You're actually going to tell him. Well, that's what I call the basest treachery—but I give you up," Rolla called out after her, as she quickly left the room.

The reserve between Clemency and her father had lessened considerably in the last year. She was learning by degrees to take her right place with both father and mother, but enough of the old awe remained, to make it an effort to speak to him on

any subject on which they had ever disagreed. She found Mr. Franklyn pacing up and down his private room, by fire-light; it was too dark to see his face, but the tone of his "Come in, if you really have anything to say to me, if not, I don't want to be disturbed," was discouraging enough to make her half disposed to retreat again. "Well, what is it?" he said, impatiently, as she hesitated.

"I have just heard that Arthur—that Mr. Yonge is to dine at Mrs. Fowler's to-night, and I want to know whether you still wish me to go with you."

"Who told you so?"

"Rolla."

"Ah, so I thought. If I had known at first, I should have made your mother decline the invitation for you. I have reason to be dissatisfied with Arthur Yonge's conduct towards me, and I don't choose you and Rolla to keep up the close intimacy with him, your aunt encouraged. However, it is too late to send an excuse now; you must go, and speak as little to him as you can help."

"But, papa, that is what I've come to speak to you about. I will stay at home if you wish, but if I do go, I must meet Arthur Yonge like an old friend. I can't forget how fond Aunt Bessie was of him, or that when

we were children, he and Rolla and I were like brothers and sister."

"I always thought it a very ill-judged intimacy; and under present circumstances, it would be disagreeable to me to have it renewed. I have told Rolla so very plainly, but he does not seem to pay much attention to my wishes."

"Then I had better not go with you this evening, I think."

"Should you be disappointed not to go?"

"Yes; I should now."

Well, you are a good girl to come and speak so openly to me. You may go. Arthur Yonge must not be led to suppose that he can come to this house as he did to your poor aunt's, but I can trust you. Go and get ready, and don't keep me waiting."

Rolla was lying in wait for Clemency at the foot of the stairs.

"Just a minute," he said, catching her dress. "I want to tell you something I forgot before, something that will relieve you from the necessity of stretching your head quite up to Mrs. Fowler's ceiling, when Arthur is speaking to you. There's no danger of his ever turning out to be the deliverer I prophesied of, for he is engaged, or all but

engaged, to Mr. Wilson's sister, the pretty one, who has lately come home from school. Now, Clem, upon my honour, this is not a conversational stone; I have heard it on excellent authority, and I a good deal believe it."

"On old Evan's authority?"

"No, not on old Evan's authority; though his would not have been very bad. Miss Emily Wilson, like myself, chooses her chief friends and confidants among the pitmen. I have seen her talking to a dozen at a time, at the mouth of the Vale Combe pits, and Arthur standing beside her, listening deferentially. She and Arthur have done all their flirtation over model cottages and schools and penny readings: the whole county is giving them to each other."

"Then I hope the whole county is right," Clemency said, disengaging her dress and running away.

Fear of keeping her father waiting made her set about her toilette preparations at once; but while her hands moved, her thoughts were busy trying to call up a perfect recollection of the quiet, fair, girl's face she had been used to see at intervals in the Wilsons' pew, when she went to Tunstall Church with her aunt. "Arthur must have known her in those days," she said to herself; and then she let the heavy coils of hair she had gathered up fall over her shoulders again, while

she searched her memory, for some mention he might have made of her in some one of the many talks they had had together in old days. How beautiful the old days looked as they came back to her in her thoughts! The happy evenings in the bright little drawing-room, the discussions over books, the gay criticism of neighbours, which Aunt Bessie's gentle remonstrances kept within charitable bounds. Somehow, Clemency felt relieved when, on strictest investigation, her memory would not yield up any words of Arthur's which introduced the thought of the little quiet face from the Wilsons' pew, into her pictures of old times. They were so complete in themselves, she did not want to have new people mixed up with them. "But, oh! what am I doing?" Clemency said, half aloud, as she roused herself from her reverie, and set to work on her braids again. "Can I be so mean as to want to keep all Arthur's thoughts to myself,—I who was not valuing them at the time? I ought to be very happy to hear that he has found some one to love, worthy of him. It is only the surprise, and the not being quite able to believe it, that is uncomfortable. I wonder why I don't quite believe it. I told him to forget me, and I certainly must not be surprised if he takes me at my word. It will be much better for everyone, and

I shall be very glad when I am used to the notion. It can't make one more lonely, to lose a love one did not return, surely. It would have been a very unworthy thing of me if I had learned to cling to it. I must never again listen to Rolla's stories of all the good Arthur does, as if I had any share in them—I wonder how I could have been so vain as to let that fancy grow up. How many steps one has to go down, before one is really humble."

Clemency did not keep her father waiting, and, owing to Mr. Franklyn's rigid punctuality, they arrived at their destination a little before they were wanted. The other guests assembled slowly. Mrs. Fowler, in her bridal dress and sparkling with jewellery, looked twice as tall and overpowering as Caroline Humphreys used to look. Her brother stood about in corners and looked disapproving and out of place. The Serles were early arrivals; Mrs. George, dowdy and careworn; George Serle, with a radiant smile on his face and an air of proprietorship in the handsome room and busy host and hostess, as if he had something to do with their being there. The room was half full when Mr. and Miss Wilson and Arthur Yonge entered together; and Clemency felt glad that her position, in the corner of the sofa, enabled her to observe them without being noticed herself.

She had not been in the same room with Arthur, since they had parted at Seaford, and now she found it so strange to see the well-known face and hear the familiar voice, and not be able to claim any closer intimacy than the strangers around, that she was glad of the screen of Mr. Humphreys' broad person to hide behind, till the first rush of painful recollections had past away. It was some minutes before Arthur found her out, and came up and spoke to her. His greeting interrupted a long speech of Mr. Humphreys, and was necessarily a brief one. Two or three words, spoken in a voice which brought back the old home more vividly than anything else had done since she left it, a shake of the hand, a long look from two earnestly kind eyes that seemed to read her heart, and then Arthur had retreated into the crowd again, and Mr. Humphreys had resumed the thread of his story. While it went on, Clemency had time to remember that such anxiously kind looks were not so commonly given to her now as in former days, and that therefore she need not be surprised at herself, for valuing them more than she had done when they were as common as the air she breathed.

Jane Humphreys' shrill voice, breaking the even flow of her brother's discourse, brought back Clemency's attention to what was going on.

"We want your opinion," she began. "Mrs. Fowler and Caroline are discussing whether we shall wait any longer for the Edgecombes. I said I would ask you, John, and Miss Franklyn, whether you thought it likely that they would keep their word. I think you used to know Colonel Edgecombe particularly well at one time, Miss Franklyn. What do you say of him? Is he a person to be thoroughly depended upon? or is he apt to be changeable and disappoint one's expectations?"

The eyes that tried to read Clemency's face now, were certainly not particularly kind ones. She was glad to find that she could look and speak so unconcernedly as to disappoint them of the amusement they expected.

"Without accusing Colonel Edgecombe of caprice," Clemency said, "I think I can predict that he will not be here to-night. His mother arrived to-day at High Combe, and I dare say neither he nor Sydney will like to leave her."

"But an engagement is an engagement, you know, Miss Franklyn. Oh! I am a very scrupulous person: I can't think well of anyone who breaks his word in small things or great. I look upon it as a mark of character. Ah! there they are—no—positively, it is Mrs. Walter Edgecombe alone: and she promised so

faithfully to bring her husband. It is really too bad. My dear Sydney" (going forward to greet her), "we were growing uneasy about you. We had given you up. John and Miss Franklyn and I were accusing you of being quite an undependable person, who could not be trusted to keep her engagements. Very unjustifiable of *us* to say such things of *you*, was it not, dear?"

"It was only Miss Humphreys who did say it," Clemency interposed, hoping to make a diversion in Sydney's favour, and being somewhat surprised at the deprecating, anxious glance, so much more serious than the occasion called for, which passed from little Mrs. Edgcombe's upturned eyes to her tall questioner's.

At dinner Clemency found herself next Mr. Humphreys, and directly opposite Arthur Yonge and Miss Wilson. There was not much conversation going on at her side of the table, so she had abundant leisure to observe her opposite neighbours. They had certainly a great deal to say to each other, and were on very friendly terms; but Clemency observed that Arthur had entirely thrown aside the proud, shy reserve he had worn towards everyone but herself and her aunt, in the days when his grandfather and he had afforded subjects for so much gossip to their neighbours. Prosperity

and the general goodwill had softened down the spirit of defiance a sense of injustice had roused, and given his natural gay kind-heartedness and sociability, fair play. He would always be a popular person now wherever he went, Clemency saw clearly, and the days when he needed her advocacy were utterly gone for ever. She had often heard him talk quite as pleasantly before, as he did that day; she was not surprised at anything he said; but it was new to see everyone in the room listening with interest,—even her father, though he tried hard at first not to allow his attention to be caught by what Arthur was saying. She began to think that the year and a half that had passed since they parted, had made a greater difference than she was disposed to believe, an hour ago. However familiar his voice or his kind eyes might be, she certainly had not met again precisely the playmate whom she had ruled and quarrelled with, and thought herself very discerning for looking up to secretly. The quiet little face by Arthur's side answered more exactly to Clemency's previous thoughts about it. After much observation, Clemency concluded that it looked just the same, talking at a dinner-party, as it had used to look, listening or singing, at church. The lips after moving fell always into the same composed lines, the grave

brown eyes dwelt on her neighbour's face as thoughtfully as they had formerly been raised to the preacher's. It was a young-looking face, with small regular features and soft-falling brown curls, and yet there was a certain self-dependence and quiet resolution expressed in it, which made Rolla's stories of Miss Wilson's management of her school of rough miners more believable to Clemency than she had found them hitherto.

"She must be very different from me. I should like to know more of her," Clemency thought, as she listened to her evenly-flowing voice taking a considerable share in the conversation, and expressing opinions in a very quiet though decided way.

When they were in the drawing-room, Clemency found a seat by Miss Wilson's side. It was not difficult to draw her into conversation. She was very ready to talk to anyone who would listen, about the sayings and doings of her scholars, and of the various disappointments and successes, that had attended the plans her brother and Mr. Yonge had undertaken for the benefit of their workpeople. It was not with any idea of being admired for her own benevolence, she talked, but simply because her whole mind and heart were brimfull of the occupations in which her days were spent, and

she could not imagine any more interesting or moving topic, than the attainments of miners, who three months ago had not known the difference between a thistle and a daisy, or so much as heard of the children of Israel.

Sydney Edgecombe, to escape Mrs. Fowler's reproaches, kept close to Clemency and Miss Wilson, and listened to the conversation that went on between them, with a great deal of interest. To her it was like a glimpse into a new world—a world of energy and self-denial and untiring occupation for others, under which there seemed to lie a mysterious fulness of rest and satisfaction, which her poor, anxious, pining soul had never known. The sound of Emily Wilson's soft-flowing voice, the quiet light that beamed from her face, and some words that fell from her, now and then, that seemed to point to some perfect, unfailing help and guidance by which her life was sustained, all impressed Sydney's mind strongly. She had all her life been envying some one, and now she looked at Miss Wilson's neat, rather precise little person, and wished she could transport her own consciousness into it. How happy she must be with a brother who never caused her any anxiety, and a home, the home of her birth, in which she might, if she pleased, stay for ever! Sydney

thought just then she could get up and prophesy to all young girls, against the folly of imagining that peace and heart-satisfaction must necessarily follow them into new homes. Had not she tried with high hopes and a very fervent love, and what had it all come to?

She had been seated next to her brother George at dinner, and though she had not succeeded in getting him to give the promise Lizzie required, she had been much cheered by the confident expectations of coming good fortune he had imparted to her; and gratified at being taken into his confidence again. The familiar allusions to old household jests and family by-words, the recurrence to childish stories, had all been very sweet to her; even Lizzie's old dark shot-silk had brought with it a certain flavour of bygone high days and holidays, that no splendours of toilette at High Combe ever gave. After all, there is nothing like one's first home, Sydney sighed; and then, remembering that she had lived within a few miles of the Valley Pits all her life, she wondered whether she should have escaped the discontents and longings which had led her to deeds for which she was now paying so dearly, if she had been so lucky as to think of teaching miners to read.

"Miss Wilson will be happy," she said to herself. "She is too busy and too religious to fall in love; she

will live always in her own home, and never know the *real* troubles of life that come to one when one is married."

And meanwhile Clemency, with equal inconsistency, was sketching out a very different lot, in reward for Emily Wilson's goodness.

"She is so wise and quiet," Clemency thought; "she will never be dazzled by outside show; she will appreciate real goodness and worth when she sees it, and make no mistakes in her life."

It was not till quite the close of the evening, that Arthur Yonge found an opportunity of seating himself by Clemency's side.

"I wonder whether you understand my keeping away till now," he said; "whether you feel as I do; that we—that I, at least—had better be satisfied with looking, than talk commonplaces that everybody might hear, like ordinary acquaintances. I was very glad to see you talking to Miss Wilson."

"Why?" Clemency asked, rather timidly, for she was not quite sure she wished for the confidence she expected would follow.

"Only because she is the one person in the room I know well enough to cross-question, and I hope to hear all you have said, at second-hand, to-morrow."

"It has not been much. Miss Wilson has done all the talking."

"So I rather feared. She has been telling you about our new church and the schools, I suppose?"

"Does she ever talk about anything else?" Clemency asked, adding, immediately afterwards, on seeing a little sparkle of amusement in Arthur's eye, "I did not mean to make a joke of her, indeed. I admire her so much."

"No one could have the heart to make a joke of her; she has such large faith in one's sympathy, it would be too bad to disappoint her. I saw you were interested."

"Yes, indeed. How very much she seems to do—so quietly and gently, too. I wonder what she finds to say to the miners. I should be afraid of them. I should feel that their hard lives must have taught them so much more than my idle one, that nothing I could say would seem real to them."

"Yet they might be glad of your coming to talk to them for all that. If you were living a great part of your life underground, or in any sordid place, don't you think it would do you good to come up now and then, to see a violet, or hear a bird sing?"

"Yes: but Miss Wilson would not approve of that way of looking at her teaching. She would be shocked

that you should put herself before what she considers her message."

"And rightly. Besides, at best, it's a poor comparison. The violet and the bird could not make it understood that they had sought out the sad eyes and the weary ears out of pure pity and love, for the express purpose of pleasing and soothing them. That's the gist of the message, to my mind."

Clemency glanced across the room to where Miss Wilson was standing exchanging last words with Mr. Humphreys, her quiet face intent on some instructions he was giving her about the diet of a poor patient for whom he had asked her good offices.

"Yes, I am sure it must do one good to hear and see her. I wish I might try to know more of her myself."

Mr. Franklyn came up at this moment to tell Clemency it was time to go. She was grateful for having been allowed to continue her conversation with Arthur even so long as it had already lasted, and rose to follow her father immediately.

"I am very glad I came here this evening," she said, emphatically, as she wished Arthur good-night.

She was still thinking of Emily Wilson, and did not know how her words sounded to Arthur, or how much joy and hope he managed to extract from them.

CHAPTER X.

Sweet are the rosy memories of the lips
That first kissed ours, albeit they kiss no more.
Sweet is the sight of sunset—sailing ships,
Altho' they leave us on a lonely shore.
Sweet are familiar songs, tho' Music dips
Her hollow shell in Thought's forlornest wells.
And sweet, though sad, the sound of midnight bells,
When the oped casement with the night-rain drips.

Owen Meredith.

MRS. FRANKLYN had a way of comforting herself for other people's sorrows, which was apt at times to be a little trying to the sufferers themselves, when she expressed to them her views on the dispensations of Providence.

To be sure her own crosses and disappointments did not admit of being explained away into blessings with the same facility, but then she honestly believed that there was a peculiar stamp put on everything nearly concerning herself, that did raise it quite above the common level.

During the second winter of Clemency's residence at

the Red Hill House, when an accumulation of domestic anxieties caused her to feel strongly the advantage of having a grown-up daughter living with her, on whose ready aid she could always reckon in any emergency, she very frequently fell into strains of self-gratulation that were not always as inspiring to her auditor as they were to herself. The recurrence of Clemency's birthday that year furnished an occasion for holding forth, which Mrs. Franklyn could not help improving; especially as it was an uncomfortable drizzling day when nobody called, and when the amount of exercise which Mrs. Franklyn prescribed for herself, and for everyone in the house over whom her authority extended, had to be taken on the raised red brick-dusted walk in front of the house.

"You are no doubt thinking a great deal to-day of your Aunt Bessie," she said to Clemency, "and of the sort of festival she used to make, poor thing, in honour of your birthday. I have never done anything of the kind for my children's birthdays, and I never thought it wise to make such a fuss about yours; though I am glad to remember that I always paid poor Aunt Bessie the compliment of attending her little fête. It is a great consolation, when people are gone, to think that one did everything that could be expected of one when

they were alive. Poor Aunt Bessie! How little I thought, when I went to her house on your nineteenth birthday, that it was for the last time. You are not crying, Clemency? My dear, I did not mean to say anything to grieve you. We are all sorry for our loss; but when one looks round and reflects on all that has happened since, one can't but feel that it was ordered to take place just at the right time. It would have been a great trial to me to have had Rolla living at home, if you had not been here to take all trouble for him, off my hands; and if—as Mr. Franklyn threatens—we are obliged to send away the children's governess and the upper nurse, it will seem, I am sure, quite a remarkable dispensation that you should be here ready to take their places. The dear children are very fond of you, and I should not be surprised if they got on better with you than with the governess; so you see there are compensations to all trials, if one only takes them in a right spirit. All that I am saying applies equally to another occurrence of that year—sometimes I think you don't like me to allude to it; but I don't know why you should not, for I only speak to cheer your spirits,—I mean the disappointment about Colonel Edgecombe. I am sure, I thought myself at one time that you would have been married to him long ago. I was so annoyed

when the news came that he was engaged to Sydney Serle instead of to you, that for a whole month I could not make up my mind to call on any one in Tunstall, I felt the disagreeable remarks that were made about your disappointment so much. I have no doubt you were a little mortified yourself at the time; but I hope you see now how wisely it was ordered. You can be more useful to your brothers and sisters and your father and me, living at home, than even if you were mistress of High Combe; and that thought will make up to you for everything, I'm sure. There must be old maids in the world, and I believe they generally have some early disappointment to—to—fall back upon, one may say. It is a lucky thing for you to have got over yours so early, and I really can't imagine anything pleasanter or more inspiring than the sort of even quiet life that I see spread out before you now,—teaching your sisters, devoting your little fortune to help your father in the difficulties that threaten us,—staying at home with him when I have by-and-bye to take them out into the world,—making yourself useful to us both in our old age, when your younger sisters are all married and settled in houses of their own,—the sort of life one might write a book about, and that must be so gratifying to have lived when one comes to die. You did not think I

had imagination enough to plan out such a beautiful history for you on your birthday, did you, my dear, but you see I feel called on to try and fill Aunt Bessie's place. We have taken our fifty turns and may go in now. How it passes the time to have some one to talk to; I shall never be able to bear a solitary walk again. You had rather stay out a little longer alone? Well, as you please; only mind you are in before Rolla, and don't let him go up into the nursery and tempt the children to be noisy. I will just go and take my nap before dinner, knowing I can quite depend on you. It must make you very happy, my dear, to see that I trust you so thoroughly."

Mrs. Franklyn nodded pleasantly to Clemency, from the top of the steps she had mounted during her last sentence, and let herself into the house, quite in a fervent glow of self-admiration for the high sentiments she had been expounding, and for the kind feeling which allowed her to assign to her step-daughter such a fine, self-sacrificing rôle in life. Clemency's dutiful efforts to please her during all these months had not been void of effect; they had wrought her up to such a point of good-will, that she could complacently contemplate owing her future comfort in life to her, and sincerely wish her to receive in return the spiritual and

moral rewards, she valued enough to assign with satisfaction to other people.

Clemency meanwhile took advantage of her freedom to vary her monotonous walk (as Mrs. Franklyn never would) by running down the little hill on which the house stood, and following the road to the turning from which a glimpse could be gained of the tapering church-spire and dark clustering houses of Tunstall, and of the distant Combe Woods climbing the furthest hill to the wintry sky beyond. It was a dark night, but the rosy glow of the Combe valley fires flickered over all, and made even the shapes of the trees and the roofs of the houses visible. Clemency was now so seldom out of doors alone, that the freedom to stand still and look about her as much as she pleased, and to listen to the sough of the wind among the trees without a disturbing voice in her ears, was in itself pleasure enough to soothe away the irritation that her mother's discourse had roused.

"And why should I have been irritated?" she asked herself; when,—after making out to her own satisfaction the slate-coloured lines of her own old home distinguishable by their vicinity to Mr. Yonge's tall red gables,—she turned to mount the little hill again. "Why should I have felt angry, and why did the picture she drew look dreary? It ought not to have done,—the Red Hill

House and my father, and the children and Rolla, and the thoughts about the dear times with Aunt Bessie in the little Tunstall home, that I shall always keep in my mind through everything to look back upon, are surely enough for me. Some people say one cannot be satisfied with looking back—'Let the dead past bury its dead.' Yes, but mine is not a dead past, not that part of it at least; it is the link that connects me with purposes and interests beyond my own life, with good that is being done—good that results, I know, from the teaching and influence I shared. My working out of dear Aunt Bessie's lessons will be quite apart, but I shall always feel the fellowship; and the quiet life Mrs. Franklyn has been mapping out for me will be richer than any one knows. I think it is rather strange that my thoughts should always fly back to the time with Aunt Bessie before my nineteenth birthday. I have fallen into a way lately of skipping over the months I was once silly enough to fancy would make up the whole of life to me. Once I avoided recollecting them because it gave me too much pain; but I don't believe it is that now. Mrs. Franklyn's sketch of single life will not fit me: I shall not fall back, as she said, on my early disappointment, either for pathos or dignity. 'Let the dead past bury its dead,'—there I

can apply it. Yes, I have at last buried all that regret and pain; it looks more like a dream than anything real; and now, in looking back on my birthday, there is only left a little shame at myself for having been so mistaken. The last day of January, and so mild! There will be Christmas roses out still in old Mr. Yonge's garden. How things are changed with us all, since Arthur gathered a bunch for me on my birthday! What a long time those flowers lasted—till I came back from High Combe and turned them out of the vases to make room for some camellias Mrs. Edgcombe had given me. Aunt Bessie thought me ungrateful for throwing them away. How silly it is to be sorry about such long-past things. Ah, there are Rolla and papa coming up the hill. I will wait, and join them."

"Head full of melancholy birthday fancies, and feet stepping into all the puddles. I've been watching you from ever such a long way off," was Rolla's whispered greeting, as he came up behind her and put his hand on her shoulder. "Miss Emily Wilson does not walk along the roads so, I can tell you."

"What do you know about Miss Emily Wilson's way of walking along the roads?"

"Hush!—I will tell you by-and-bye when we get home."

Clemency slipped her hand under her father's arm, and looked up into his face to see if she might venture to begin a conversation. His extreme taciturnity made it always a questionable experiment; but sometimes lately he had received little anecdotes she had repeated to him about the children, or scraps of news playfully told, with a smile of amusement that encouraged her to persevere in her efforts to break down the wall of reserve within which he isolated himself even from his wife and children. To-day his face wore a more abstracted expression than usual, and Clemency saw that to talk to him would be a mere waste of words. She ran down stairs after taking off her bonnet to seek out Rolla, rather expecting that he would have some misdemeanour to confess, which would account for the displeasure in her father's looks.

Rolla was not at first in a talkative mood. He had seated himself cross-legged on the rug, and was intent on reading a pamphlet by the light of the fire. Clemency sat down by his side and peeped over his shoulder to see what it was.

"'On redeeming the Time,' my dear Rolla, a tract; where did you get it?"

"A friend of yours gave it me for you, as an appropriate offering on your twenty-first birthday."

"I shall not believe that ; it is an invention of yours—a conversational stone which I shall not swallow. He would not think of doing such a thing."

"He ! Oh, oh ! have you no friends of the feminine gender ? It was Miss Emily Wilson : there now."

"Where did you see her, and how" came she to talk to you ? And how in the world did she know it was my birthday ?"

"*He* told her, I suppose. I met her this morning talking to some miners at the mouth of the Red Hill mine-shaft, where I walked with my father."

"What did papa think of her talking to the miners, I wonder ?"

"I don't know. She did not seem at all ashamed of it ; she walked up to him, looking as pretty as possible, and explained that she had come to inquire after a scape-grace brother of one of her scholars, and invite him to an improving tea, that all the Combe Valley miners are to have to-night. My father *looked*, and said nothing,—you know how he would look,—and she finished off by offering him a pink tract, with such an honest conviction that pink tracts were all that was wanted to make him amiable, that even he was obliged to take it graciously, and say 'Thank you.' Then she sought out this one for you, and pencilled your name on it. She

has two kinds in her basket : the pink are grammatical tracts for educated people ; the white, familiar and ungrammatical, for the ordinary mining mind."

"Do you suppose any one reads them?"

"I don't know. I fancy if I were the scapegrace brother, and Miss Emily Wilson had walked four miles on a sloppy day to look after me and invite me to tea, I should think it about time to turn over a new leaf, and prove myself worth the trouble. The smaller attention of a pink tract would not have come amiss, I thought, from her to me ; but what really edified me was the state of her boots, hardly a spot upon them after her four miles' walk. She must tread on air. I suppose soil is so contrary to her nature, that it can no more stick to her clothes, than rough words can come from the miners' lips when she is within hearing."

"My dear Rolla, how enthusiastic ! I hope you are not falling in love with Miss Emily Wilson."

"Why not ? do you think it quite impossible that I should cut out Arthur Yonge ? Such bad taste may seem impossible to you, but I can see how it might come about. Miss Wilson is an enterprising young lady, and likes trouble ; Arthur is ready-made to her hands ; he would be no triumph ; but think what a credit to the pink tracts if I were to turn out a dili-

gent, pains-taking member of society. If, for example, I learned to *talk* circumspectly, four metaphorical miles on a dirty road without soiling my boots——”

“Sense, for four minutes together, would be change enough.”

“If you could know the sense I have been talking to my father to-day.”

“Ah, I was afraid so. Why do you do it, Rolla dear?”

“Why do I talk sense to my father?” Rolla stretched himself at full length on the rug, and remained silent for a minute, his face turned towards his sister, and his beautiful brown eyes, all the mirth gone out of them, fixed on her face. “Why, indeed?” he went on. “Oh, if talking would do, if wishing would do; if I could wish myself out of myself into you, and be twenty-one to-day, and speak with a man’s voice instead of a boy’s?”

“But what have you been saying, dear?”

“Every conceivable thing: from glowing descriptions of the new pumping apparatus at the Combe Valley mine, to Evan’s wildest rapping stories.”

“And you call that talking sense?”

“For my purpose, yes; besides, one must not be too particular. I grow desperate sometimes in battering

that wall of silence. In assaults, when shell is exhausted, they fire bits of iron, stones, whatever comes to hand, from the mortars, and sometimes the jagged bits do the most execution. Really, this morning I thought that a jagged bit I threw out (a remark of old Evan's) had done the business. Stubbs was out of the office, and my father actually consented to walk to Red Hill with me, and inspect the pumps, and talk to old Evan, the underground manager, who sees plainly enough how Stubbs' stinginess and mismanagement are endangering the safety of the mine. We were just going down, when Stubbs, getting wind of what was going on, hurried back, raised difficulties, contradicted everything that everybody else said, and at last carried my father away with him in another direction. I shan't get him worked up to the same point again for a month; and meanwhile, if the water which has accumulated in the old shaft breaks through to the district where the men are working now, as Evan says it will unless proper precautions are taken, and if half-a-dozen men are drowned, the whole county will cry shame on us for our negligence."

"But won't Mr. Stubbs share the blame and loss with my father?"

"Yes, but he is willing to take the risk. It would

take a long time to explain his position to you. Though he is still considered a subordinate, he is in reality more master by a long way, than my father. He has lent us a great deal of money, and he wants to get it back now as quickly as he can, and get out of the concern before the superiority of the Vale Combe people finishes us up altogether. It would not suit him to have the work stopped just now, and a thousand pounds or so spent on new machinery. He does not want my father to know how bad the old shaft is, for it is through his dishonesty, while he was manager of the mine, that it has not been kept in proper repair. He hopes, as stupid people always do, that there won't be an accident; and when he has realised his money and gone, my father may make what discoveries he likes."

"And meanwhile, fifty or sixty men are going down every day into the pit at the risk of their lives, and we get up and lie down, and eat and drink, without a thought for them. Miss Wilson may well send me tracts about redeeming the time."

"Ay, I wonder what they think of us."

"I wonder that the miners consent to go down into the pit."

"Miss Emily Wilson knows miners better than that. They never think of danger, or believe in it till it

comes ; stories of mysterious knockings and rushings are rather rifer than usual, that's all. Old Evan believes that the short cut to hell mentioned in the 'Pilgrim's Progress' communicates directly with an old district in the Red Hill mine; he hears there the steps of the evil ones who are carrying down lost spirits to fling them into the nether fire, and their sobbings and moanings. I'm going down to listen some day."

"I hope you won't."

"Yes, I shall ; if other people go, why not I. There's no use saying more about it, Clemency ; let me finish my pink tract."

"Just one more question, Rolla. Do you think want of money is the great difficulty ? Would my father consent to have the repairs made if some one—I, for instance, I am of age to-day—lent the money ?"

"I don't suppose you could ; for though you are of age, you have trustees and people, and they won't let you have a quantity of money at once. That's why I wished I was of age instead of you. Come now, I'll make you a present of three years of my life, if you can devise a way of taking it."

"You think, then, it is want of money that causes the difficulty ?"

Having money would set my father at liberty to

see with his own eyes instead of Stubbs', that is all I want. You know he never says anything, and one is kept in a perpetual state of excitement to guess what he thinks, but to-day, at the mine, he overheard me talking about going down with Evan, and I fancied I saw for a moment such a change come over his face—a look almost of horror,—I thought he had it in his mind to forbid my going down; but no, it must have been my fancy; he does not care enough about me, for that. Why should he? I am a horrible blue-bottle fly to him, always buzzing in his ears, and not to be got rid of by just opening the window."

"No, no; he does care for you, Rolla. We have done him injustice by not believing how much; I begin to understand him better, and am less afraid of him. I have made up my mind what I will do."

That evening, when Clemency brought her father's cup of tea to his chair by the fireside, instead of moving away when she had delivered it into his hands, she took up a position on the hearthrug, and stood for several minutes full in front of him, with her hands clasped behind her, and her eyes attentively studying his face.

"Well!" he said at last, raising his eyes from the tea he was stirring.

"Papa, do you remember that it is my birthday?"

"Yes, I do remember; if you like, I will wish you joy, though I don't see what good it can do you."

"It does me good, thank you. But I want something more. I want you to let me ask you some questions."

"Ask as many as you like: I don't promise to answer."

"If I wanted to give away, or lend any of the money Aunt Bessie left me, could I do it after to-day?"

"Certainly not, without the consent of your trustees, Dr. Arnays and Colonel Edgecombe, and I should say they would not be at all likely to approve of your giving away your money."

"Oh, dear, how tiresome. What's the use of having money if one may not do what one likes with it?"

"What would you like to do?"

"I should like to lend you some money."

"And I do not wish to borrow from you, my dear; so we need say no more about it."

"A few words more, please. If I could lend five hundred pounds, or whatever it would cost to repair

the works at Red Hill, would you consent to the work being done?"

"Not on Rolla's opinion that it ought to be done, certainly."

"But if a competent opinion agreed with his?"

"I can't answer on two ifs."

"Papa, may I talk about this wish of mine with Mrs. Edgecombe? She knows more of what Aunt Bessie's real intentions were than any one else. Aunt Bessie appointed Colonel Edgecombe to act for Rolla and me, that she and he together might carry them out. If they were convinced that it would be for Rolla's good afterwards to let us have that money now, perhaps they would think of some clever way of managing it, and you would consent if they did."

"They can't consent."

"But may I talk to Mrs. Edgecombe?"

"I have never found a way of preventing either you or Rolla from talking yet."

Mr. Franklyn's looks were not so ungracious as his words; and Clemency, in leaning forward to take his cup, stooped a little lower than was necessary and kissed his forehead.

"Mrs. Edgecombe has invited me to spend a day at

High Combe next week, and she means to ask you and mamma and Rolla to dine in the evening. You will go, to please me, papa?"

"It certainly will not be to please myself."

CHAPTER XI.

I would that you were all to me,
You that are just so much, no more,
Nor yours nor mine, nor slave nor free !
Where does the fault lie ? what the core
Of the wound, since wound must be ?

Browning.

MRS. EDGECOMBE had had several short interviews with Clemency soon after her arrival ; but she did not invite her to spend a whole day at High Combe till she herself had been nearly three months at home.

“ You know I want to have you,” she had said once, and the idea of feeling herself neglected, or of doubting the kindness of her old friend never entered Clemency’s mind. The truth was, that Mrs. Edgecombe’s efforts to reconcile herself to her son’s marriage with Sydney, were not so successful as to make her feel it safe to subject her temper to the trial of seeing the actual and the wished-for daughter, contrasted together for a whole day.

She still at times revolved in her mind the project

that had consoled her on her return home, and while throwing herself into her son's pursuits and interests with all the energy of her character, made it an ultimate object to educate Sydney into a capacity for sharing them by-and-by. Meanwhile fresh little jars and misunderstandings arose each day, which made the first steps towards such an education extremely difficult, and after a time caused them to be indefinitely postponed.

Sydney, not appreciating the benevolent designs towards her, which lay at the bottom of Mrs. Edgcombe's mind, naturally felt aggrieved when she found herself thrust aside from even the small share of her husband's confidence and companionship she had hitherto enjoyed. She had been extremely puzzled what to say to him when he had consulted her. She had found the long readings from incomprehensible poems, which he had inflicted on her during the first months after their marriage, very tedious, and was sorry that he objected to her counting the stitches of her beadwork all the time ; but now, when she might have gone on counting beads the whole evening without any one finding fault, she was apt to let her work fall in her lap and listen sadly and wistfully to the discussions about books and politics, in which husband and mother-

in-law equally took it for granted she could have no interest.

"You must not let yourself be put down and made a nobody in your own house," Lizzie said to her one day when, in the desolateness of her heart, she had been moved to lay her complaint before Mrs. George Serle, and Sydney was spurred on by even that amount of encouragement to make (as Lizzie advised) a stand against her mother-in-law's encroachments.

Unfortunately she had not courage to put herself forward as a sharer in the pursuits of her husband's leisure hours. She took her stand instead on a punctilious maintenance of her authority as mistress of the house, and became nervously alert to circumvent and resent any act of Mrs. Edgecombe's, that seemed to entrench on the supremacy of her rule.

Mrs. Edgecombe had really no wish whatever to usurp Sydney's right place at the head of the household. Nothing could be further from her thought than to engage in a struggle for authority there; but she was careless and forgetful in what seemed to her unimportant matters, and she had long been in the habit of ruling everything at High Combe. She offended against Sydney's little punctilios now and then, and allowed them to become occasions for those ceaseless explana-

tions and discussions about trifles, that are of all things most unfavourable to family peace.

"You surely don't suppose that it is my fault," Mrs. Edgecombe said one day, when Colonel Edgecombe chanced to overhear a polite word-contention between his wife and his mother about some trifling household arrangement, and directed amazed looks at them both.

"You surely don't suppose that *I* care about such nonsense, or that *I* have any dignity to stand upon that can be affected by giving or not giving orders to housemaids, or by deciding what I am to eat for my dinner?"

She did not mean to injure Sydney when she let the hasty words pass her lips, and never knew how they, and the flash of scorn from her eyes that accompanied them, rankled in her son's mind.

In her opinion Sydney had far more than her due, and was by no means the person in the house who most deserved pity. She was amazed at the consideration and affection her son showed his wife, and almost grudged the patience with which he listened to her petulant or inconsequent remarks. He had not been quite so forbearing, she remembered, on the few occasions in their lives when, for his own good, she had had to oppose him, and it now seemed strange to her that

the silly little wife, who did not even pay him the compliment of preferring his society to that of her own commonplace friends, should be treated with more tenderness than she, his mother, who for years had given him the utmost worship of her heart.

With so many sources of discomfort round her, Mrs. Edgecombe rather shrank from such a resumption of the habits of happier days, as having Clemency with her for a whole day at Combe would be; and when she welcomed her at last, it was with feelings very equally balanced between pain and pleasure.

They were alone in Mrs. Edgecombe's own sitting-room for the greater part of the morning. Both thought they should have a great deal to say after so long a separation, yet after the first hour or so, when the conversation turned chiefly on remembrances of Aunt Bessie, Mrs. Edgecombe found that the flow of talk ceased on her side. She was forced to be silent now on the one topic that really occupied her. In previous times, her plans and hopes for her son had filled up a larger space in her confidences with her young friend than she was quite aware of. Now hopes were over, and complaints must be kept to herself. She felt as if a seal had been put on her heart, and that it could never flow out in happy confidence again.

"You must talk to me about yourself, Clemency," she said at last, when a silence of some minutes between them began to be remarkable. "I am not worth talking about. I have not been stealing sweets like Tom in the story-book, but I feel, like him, all over prickles;—very dangerous to come near, and distasteful to myself. Let me alone, and tell me all you are doing and thinking about."

Clemency, who had been hoping for some such permission, launched at once into talk about Rolla and the Red Hill mine, and the plan which she had formed on her birthday. She was very much in earnest in wishing to gain her friend's interest, and win her to second her scheme, and she grew very animated and eager as she went on. Mrs. Edgecombe looked and listened, not taking in the words so much as the looks and gestures of the speaker, and as she gazed down on the bright face turned up to hers, a sudden bitter sense of loneliness came over her, and she was for a moment half angry that the one person who might have shared her disappointment, should be so entirely engrossed in new interests.

"What a thing it is to be young," she said, gently, but with a touch of discontent in her voice, when Clemency paused for her assent to the reasons in favour of

her plan. "The sorrows of middle-aged people are not picturesque, and that is the reason, I suppose, one hears so little of them, but I am disposed to think that, after all, they are the only really tragical griefs in the world. It is only when one has ceased to be young that one can receive incurable wounds; it is only then one finds one's hands empty, when the treasures one is clinging to are torn away. Yes, it is a great thing to be young. My dear Clemency, don't look pained. I can't bear to see the light die out of your face. I don't wish to lessen your interest in what you are talking about. I am attending, and you shall hear what I think soon——; but I am, as I said, a prickly, discontented, old woman, and that was a cry of pain I could not keep to myself."

Clemency took Mrs. Edgecombe's hand, and rested her cheek on it, as she answered—

"Yes, I know. I have known all along that you must have felt Aunt Bessie's death, and other things that happened that year, more than any one else could."

"You think so; but, Clemency, some people would say that the changes of that year had been harder on you than on me. You lost your best friend, and exchanged a perfectly happy home for one which must

have many trials for you. A great deal seemed snatched away from you just then, yet it has not made you discontented."

"At first it did; while I felt as if the blessings were *snatched* away, I did feel, as you said, my hands empty; but afterwards, by degrees, from thinking of many sayings of Aunt Bessie's that I had not cared for before, I began to see that the things I valued were not snatched, but gently drawn away, and that by leaving off clinging to them, I might feel I was giving them up of my own will;—that made such a difference I can't explain why, but it did. After that it seemed somehow as if all the best part was given back to me. Aunt Bessie and the old home seem sometimes to have come so much into the new, that I find I have more of them really than I used to have. When I discover some good quality, in my mother for instance, that Aunt Bessie always saw, and that I used not to believe in, I feel as if I were nearer Aunt Bessie than when she was alive, and so I do when I see a way of carrying out any of her wishes. Her great wish was that Rolla and papa should be drawn together; she used to blame herself for having separated them by taking us from home in our childhood. I think that the project I have been explaining to you would do more to bring

about a better understanding between papa and Rolla, than anything else could ; it would help them to work together comfortably. Rolla's character has been wonderfully developed by the interest he is taking in this question about the mine, and now he would throw himself heart and soul into work, if he saw a hope of having the things he considers wrong set right. Papa would find out how really clever he is, and learn to trust him instead of the people who are betraying his confidence. Am I selfish, dear Mrs. Edgecombe, to work round to my point again ? I see you are smiling at me."

"At your notions of selfishness, then, Clemency ; it does not help me to give you up, to hear you talk in this way, or propound such schemes as these."

"But I never said you were to give me up ; indeed I do not mean to let you. I am just as much your god-daughter as when I was living with dear Aunt Bessie, and I expect you to help me all the same."

"So I will. There, that is Walter's knock at the door. I did not mean that we should be interrupted till dinner-time, but I suppose he has letters for me. I will let him in, and you shall repeat to him what you have been telling me ; only we must be careful not to confirm his opinion of woman's incapacity to understand business, by urging our plans if

he pronounces them impracticable. Remember it is a question of can, not will. Proving ever so clearly that Aunt Bessie's wishes would have accorded with yours if she had been alive now, will not justify him in departing ever so little from what is written—remember that."

Colonel Edgecombe proved a more interested listener to Clemency's history than Mrs. Edgecombe had been; he stopped her every now and then to ask questions, or to confirm Rolla's statements by rumours he had himself heard. He was quite ready to allow that some steps to remedy the evil which weighed so much on Rolla's mind ought to be taken, but he negatived Clemency's proposition as authoritatively as Mr. Franklyn had done. He assured her that she had not the power to assist her father in the way she wished; and then he went on to explain the obstacles, and Clemency listened with an intelligent but very sorrowful face.

"I see," she said, "there is no use saying more; you cannot help us. I can only echo Rolla's wish that he could give away three years' of his life, and be twenty-one to-morrow. I don't know how many of mine I would not give for the same purpose,—but there's no use talking more about it, I see."

Clemency rose from her seat as she spoke, and walked to the further end of the room, to examine some Italian sketches that were scattered on the table, and Mrs. Edgecombe pushed her letters aside, and went up and spoke in a low voice to her son.

"Walter, you must think of some way of satisfying her. Could not I lend Mr. Franklyn the money necessary for this work. Rolla might repay me if he liked, by-and-by."

"He would not be obliged to repay you, and he might not live to do so ; but if you choose, of course you could lend the money, or I could, which I should prefer. You wish it done?"

"I have set my heart on it beyond anything. You must manage it for me."

"I will speak to Mr. Franklyn this evening. My trusteeship to his children has led him to speak to me of his affairs before, and I know something of the difficulties he is in, so it will be less embarrassing to open the subject. I will talk to Rolla first, and after dinner you shall hear how I have sped."

As he was leaving the room, Colonel Edgecombe turned back to say—

"You don't mean to shut Miss Franklyn up in your

boudoir all the afternoon, I hope. Sydney is alone in the drawing-room, and will be glad of your company."

"Come down and see *how* glad Sydney will be," Mrs. Edgecombe said to Clemency, when he had gone. "Men are juster than women, they say, and above mixing themselves up in petty domestic quarrels; that is to say, they shut their eyes tight, and only see as much of what passes round them as is convenient. Walter will go on believing he believes that poor little Sydney is fond of my company to the end of his life, just because it suits him to leave us together. I, who can see plainly enough that the poor child can't endure me, compassionately keep out of her way as much as I can. However, we will go down and do our duty for the rest of the evening."

The hours till Mr. and Mrs. Franklyn arrived passed rather slowly. Mrs. Walter Edgecombe was a much less agreeable person than the Sydney Serle of old times. The sense of having a dignity to keep up weighed on her, and restrained all the pretty looks and winning childlike ways, that in former days had made her so charming.

Clemency heard with dismay the short answers, half-resentful, half-frightened, with which she repulsed every

effort Mrs. Edgecombe made to draw her into their conversation.

To outside observers, it always seemed that the elder Mrs. Edgecombe was the aggrieved person in the intercourse between herself and her young daughter. Her manner was always perfectly gentle, almost affectionate, while Sydney had the air of guarding herself, sullenly and coldly, from being won to confidence by her kindness. Clemency could not prevent her thoughts flying off from the conversation she was languidly keeping up with Mrs. Edgecombe to thoughts of past times, when she and her two companions had spent winter afternoons like this in the same room, with the same books and pictures lying about on the tables and easels, and the same faint scent of winter flowers coming in from the conservatory, and when their talk and manner to each other had been so different.

Mr. and Mrs. Franklyn's entrance was a welcome interruption. Rolla appeared half-an-hour later, having been carried off by Colonel Edgecombe for a walk round the gardens. He was in the wildest spirits, and in such a hopelessly talkative mood that even the heavy atmosphere of High Combe could not keep him quiet.

"Shall we have a game of transformations?" he whispered to Clemency, when he had taken a rapid glance

round the room. "Mrs. Walter Edgecombe into little Sydney Serle to begin with. Now watch."

Then he went and seated himself by Sydney's side, and during dinner he succeeded in drawing her into animated discourse on his and her exploits in old holiday times at Vale Combe. She grew excited enough to vie with him in recalling the most extravagant stories of their past plots, and triumphs over Mrs. George Serle, and their hairbreadth escapes from disgrace and punishment. It was not the gentle, timid Sydney Serle with whom Colonel Edgecombe had fallen in love that these reminiscences brought back, but the excited, hoydenish, innocently gay country girl she could be when free from anxiety and restraint: a phase of her character of which Colonel Edgecombe had hardly as yet had a distant glimpse. He looked on and listened, amused with all he heard, pleased too, to see his wife's sweet face, dimpling again with the smiles that had been sadly absent of late, and yet feeling every now and then a pang of painful surprise at the discovery that she could be something to other people she had never been with him, and that in their year's intercourse he had failed to set her as completely at ease as she could be.

Mrs. Edgecombe shrugged her shoulders, and devoted

herself pointedly to the entertainment of the elder guests whom Sydney was neglecting, and Clemency was troubled with a return of the elder-sister feeling which had made her in old times listen to Rolla's and Sydney's chatter through Mrs. Edgecombe's ears, and long to check what she knew was lowering them in her estimation. She was also a little provoked with Rolla for choosing that particular evening for making himself conspicuously childish, when so much depended on his being able to inspire Colonel Edgecombe with respect for his opinion.

Her anxiety on this subject was set at rest by a few words from Colonel Edgecombe just before they left Combe.

"Rolla has amazed me this evening," he began.

"By the amount of nonsense he has talked? I was afraid so."

"By the amount of sense he has talked. Your father and I had some conversation on matters of business after dinner. The state of the works at Red Hill was mentioned, and Rolla, without taking too much on himself, managed to give us so much information, and throw out so many clever suggestions, showing such thorough knowledge of what he was talking about, that I could hardly trust my ears. Your father was almost

as much astonished as I, and, I think, pleased, though he says so little."

"But can any good result from the conversation? You said this morning there was nothing to be done."

"But now I am more hopeful. I am expecting a visit from a very clever mining engineer who is to inspect some of the mines on the Combe property. Your father has consented to let him go over the Red Hill mine with me, and Rolla has undertaken to time our visit, so as to secure us from any interference from Mr. Stubbs, with whom your father does not wish to have any altercation just now. I shall forward his report to your father; and if the mine can be put into a safe condition, the money to do so shall not be wanting. Your father has consented to be my debtor for the present, till you and Rolla can take the responsibility on yourselves. You are to consider that it is your doing—the working out of your suggestion."

"And papa is not vexed?"

"He is immensely relieved. He has anxieties of many kinds pressing upon him just now; and he is quite willing to turn over this one to Rolla's management, since he has proved himself competent to the task. I believe it will be the beginning of a new era to them both. Rolla's courage and penetration will be of

immense service to his father, if he once begins to trust him and talk over his affairs freely with him."

"I don't know how to thank you enough. You have made me very happy!" Clemency said. Her eyes, raised to his face, were bright with gratitude and self-forgetting joy. She had almost forgotten just then to whom she was speaking, for her mind was too full of gladness about the present, to have room in it for any recollections of past feelings that might have embarrassed her.

He turned away abruptly, without making any answer to her last speech, not quite sure that his mind was as free from regretful comparisons of old with present times, as he saw that hers was.

In the fervency of her happiness Clemency had unconsciously raised her voice in speaking the last sentence. Every one in the room but Mrs. Franklyn and Sydney guessed the subject of the conversation. Mrs. Franklyn resolved to give Clemency a little lecture when they were out walking next day on the impropriety of expressing herself so strongly; while through Sydney's mind there passed a thought, that was almost the echo of one that had already been in her husband's that evening. She wondered, as she looked in Clemency's animated face, how it was that other people managed to find such much pleasanter things to

talk to Colonel Edgecombe about, than ever occurred to her.

The thought was the same in both their minds ; but it dwelt longest in Sydney's, and gave her most pain.

CHAPTER XII.

The joy I might have had of yore
I have not : for 'tis now no more.
Yet, beyond hope or purpose blest,
In my rash choice, let be confess'd
The tenderer Providence that rules
The fates of children and of fools !

Coventry Patmore.

COLONEL EDGECOMBE'S time was much occupied during the next fortnight ; and Sydney, finding that his mornings and afternoons were spent in riding or walking about the country with the Engineer who was staying at High Combe, and his evenings in poring over papers and estimates, could not refrain from some petulant remonstrances on his giving himself such an extraordinary amount of trouble just to please the Franklyns. There was no use in explaining to her, that the greater part of the work on which he was engaged had nothing to do with the Franklyns ; she had, once for all, associated their names with the Engineer, and the business in which his visit had involved her husband,

and she could not be persuaded to regard either with anything but extreme disfavour.

On the day when Colonel Edgecombe did visit the Red Hill Mine he was detained an hour or two beyond his usual time of returning home, and he found Sydney, with flushed face and trembling limbs, pacing up and down between the hall and the library, watching for his return in a state of nervous apprehension, into which she had been worked up by a little real anxiety and a good deal of fretful temper. He was really compassionate at first, and very sorry for the uncomfortable hours she had passed ; but when he had shown himself, as he considered, sufficiently penitent, he became, man-like, very much set on proving the folly of her fears, and bringing her to confess that she had been unreasonable in giving way to them.

Sydney argued the point more tenaciously than usual.

" You ought to have known I should be anxious," she insisted. " Were not you and Mr. Henderson talking about accidents all last evening in the most frightful way ? And when you did not come at the right time, what could I suppose but that you had been blown up, or burned, or drowned, or some of the things that are always happening in mines ? "

"Occasionally ; not always. Besides, my dear, I told you this morning that I was not going down into the mine myself."

"I did not think that made any difference ; accidents may happen anywhere, I believe. There was a man at Vale Combe fell on his head from a coal-truck and was killed, at the mouth of the shaft. That might just as well have happened to you."

"Hardly ; as I was not likely to get on a coal-truck. At all events, the chance was too remote to justify such an agony of apprehension ; you might have supposed a hundred causes for my absence more probable than that."

"No ; I think it was just the most natural thing in the world for me to think of. Why, the poor man was brought into the kitchen at Manor Combe, and I saw him there myself ; all the arguments in the world won't make me forget that. You and your mother seem to think that talking about 'probable,' and 'reasonable,' and so on, alters one's feelings ; it does not with me. I know what I think, and all the words in the world won't alter it. While you are reasoning I go on thinking just the same ; I never can see that what you say makes the least difference."

Colonel Edgecombe sighed. He was sufficiently con-

vinced of the peculiarity of mental constitution to which his wife confessed ; but it did not make the prospect of future conversations with her very cheering.

"What are you thinking about, Walter?" she asked, after a pause, not being somehow quite satisfied with the last word she had had in the dispute.

"I was wondering, my dear, what you would do if I ever should have to return to India. You would lead a wretched life, if you spent all the hours you were left alone, in conjuring up possible and impossible dangers for me."

"It would be different then," Sydney argued. "When you were away I should know you were obliged to go, and I should not mind. It is thinking that you have put yourself into danger just out of—of wilfulness, that worries me so."

"Cannot you say out of neighbourly kindness ? You did not expect me to be punished with sudden death for riding over your father's fields the summer before last. Neighbourly offices found more favour in your eyes in those days."

Sydney did not quite see the drift of this remark ; but the reference to old times brought up a contrast that had been rankling all day.

"Yes," she said, "it was very different in those days.

Your kindnesses were for my friends then, and now they are all for people who have no claim upon you. You will do anything for Mr. Franklyn, but you won't help poor George to please me."

This was already a vexed question, and Colonel Edgecombe was not pleased to have it brought up again.

"You are unjust to me, Sydney," he said, gravely. "You must know I have a sufficient motive for refusing to lend George any more money till he has broken with his present associates, who are preying on his good-nature and ruining him. Your father would approve my resolution if he knew as much of their proceedings as I do."

"But he does not approve. He thinks you unkind to George this time, and so does Lizzie. Even she wishes George to have the one more chance of redeeming his fortune that might, as he says, save him. In the old times I never thought it would come to your being harder to George than Lizzie. I thought when I married you that you would at least do all I asked for George; I thought I was doing some good to *him* at least. And now it seems as if I might just as well have married any one else."

Colonel Edgecombe drew away the arm with which he had encircled Sydney's waist, and stood, with his arms folded, silently looking at the fire. Her last

speech grated very much on his ears. He had always believed in the entire disinterestedness of her affection to him. Her devotion and affectionateness had been her great attraction in his eyes, in favour of which he thought he could dispense with other gifts; and now she seemed to be saying that she had calculated advantages in choosing him, that she had looked upon her marriage as the best means of benefiting her family. He was too much accustomed to Sydney's random way of expressing herself to attach all the meaning to her words they could have borne, but even with a large deduction for excitement and habitual exaggeration, such a speech was not pleasant hearing for a man like him, with the pride and sensitiveness and overweening love of love, his mother's exclusive affection had fostered.

"I am sorry I have disappointed your calculations, Sydney," he said, coldly.

She was beginning a vehement protestation in which George's and Lizzie's names were mixed, in bewildering incoherence, with excuses and fresh pleading, when, to Colonel Edgecombe's secret relief, the tête-à-tête was interrupted by the entrance of a servant, with the letters that had come by the afternoon post.

Sydney looked jealously at the number of letters that

came to her husband and his mother by every post : they were so sure to lead to discussions and consultations in which she had no share. That evening she stood by Colonel Edgecombe while he examined his budget, and studied his face as he read. One letter evidently surprised and agitated him. He uttered an exclamation on first glancing over it, read it through a second time, and, when he had done, asked eagerly,

“Is my mother at home ? I must go and tell her of this at once.”

He hurried from the room ; and Sydney was left to recommence her pacing up and down, and to begin a fresh process of conjuring up possible misfortunes. There was one, as she believed, always hanging over her, and it never failed to present itself to her thoughts on the smallest provocation. Since Mrs. Edgecombe had lived at High Combe she had been obliged to give frequent and dire offence to Miss Humphreys and Mrs. Fowler, by persistently resisting their efforts to force themselves into her company, and she lived in daily dread of their revenging the slights she had put upon them, by betraying the history of her treatment of their brother to Colonel Edgecombe. She spent a miserable half-hour now recalling the contemptuous looks they had given her on their last chance meeting, and convincing

herself that her husband would not have left her so hastily, if the letter which had excited him so much had not concerned her.

Mrs. Edgcombe read her son's face more truly. She was lying on the sofa reading when he entered her sitting-room. As soon as he came near enough for the light to fall on his face, she threw her book aside, and sprang up eagerly.

"What have you heard?" she said. "Some important news, I am sure, and not disagreeable."

He put the letter in her hands.

"Read," he said. "Yes, it is not disagreeable—it is very gratifying; but of no use to me."

The letter was an official one, offering him an appointment to an important post in India. There were very flattering acknowledgments of his former brilliant services, and assurances of the confidence; with which a task calling for peculiarly high qualifications would be confided to him.

Mrs. Edgcombe read, looked in her son's face, pondered over some of the sentences of the letter, and looked up again wistfully and sorrowfully, yet with a sparkle of triumph in her eyes. "They are right," she said; "you are the right man for such a post: your talents and character exactly fit you for it; you would

be happy there. It would have been the summit of your ambition two years ago."

"The summit of my ambition now; but I am no longer the right man. I have fallen behind in my two idle years. I could name several better qualified than I; there is no want of suitable men to go."

"You have been thought of first, by the best judges. Every one who knows you, but yourself, will understand why. It is a great honour."

"But it will be fruitless to me. There are other considerations now, besides my own wishes or my own fitness. I am in a different position now from what I was when I left India."

"Walter, don't reproach me for bringing you back; don't you see that I reproach myself almost every hour of every day?"

"Dearest mother, how can you imagine such a thing? I have nothing to reproach you with; we won't reproach either ourselves or each other for anything in the past; it would be a great waste of time, to say the least of it. I came to consult you. My instant thought was that I must decline to leave England. I see yours is the same; but I should like to know whether your decision is founded on the same reasons as mine."

Mrs. Edgecombe took the letter once more and bent her head over it ; a spasm of pain passed over her face before she looked up again.

"I would let you go, as far as I am myself concerned, Walter," she said ; "I would indeed. Dreadful as the second parting would be to me, I would not hold you back from such a career. I would let you go, if only—if Sydney ——"

"Precisely, it is that. You think it impossible that it could be right for her. You think it would be too great a trial ?"

"Not a trial in the sense you mean. How could it, to go with you—should I not envy her ? But in another sense, yes. I don't think you would be justified in placing her in a position for which she is so very unfit. I am not going to say a word against her ; it is not her fault ; but consider—so young, so excitable, so utterly untrained, with so very little judgment in the choice of her friends, and left so much alone as she would necessarily be—oh, it would not do ! In a prominent position like this, a man's usefulness and his reputation, too, may be at times to a considerable extent in his wife's keeping. It would be as unjust to yourself as it would be cruel to her."

She had said all she dared say. An expression that

had come over her son's face warned her that she had gone even a little too far; yet she had to press her lips together to prevent other words coming. The thought of his going from her, away with Sydney, who, she believed, did not even love him, in whom she had no sort of confidence, was like death to her.

Colonel Edgecombe could not bear the look of intense anxiety with which his mother perused his face. He walked to the other end of the room, and stood for some time in the recess of a still uncurtained window, looking out into the dim moonlit park without seeing anything. It was a very bitter moment in his life. A long-desired object was within his reach, and he found an obstacle in his path which he had himself placed there. It seemed to him as if he were called upon to give up all the objects which, in his opinion, made life desirable. He had failed to realise the dream of domestic happiness with which, on leaving India, he had solaced himself for sacrificing his ambition; and now that the old career might have been embraced again, with brighter prospects than he had ever yet had, he was barred from it by the same mistake that had ruined the other hope. He had not attained either prize. Both had been possible for him, and he had marred his life every way.

For a time his thoughts were all very dark and bitter, till at length, out of the darkness a ray of light and comfort came. He faced the worst ; looked down into the deepest depths of his heart, where he had feared to search lately, and brought back a conviction that was a fresh spring of hope and strength to him. After all, he did not, he would not, regret what he had done. In spite of all disappointments, he loved his wife well enough, loyally enough, not to grudge any loss or pain that the choice of her brought with it. She might not be what he had once thought her ; she might not even love him as much as he had hoped : but she was still herself, still his own ; the being whom he was bound to protect, and help, and guide through life, all the more lovingly because of the faults and weaknesses that turned others away. His dream of ideal love and perfect companionship might be shattered for ever ; but even out of the disappointment and the struggle he had gone through lately, another kind of love had been born, tenderer, deeper, with less thought of self in it, than any that had ever come to him before. In its presence, of which he had hardly been conscious till this moment of greatest need had revealed it to him, he felt strong enough to accept the sacrifice he was called upon to make, ungrudgingly. His mother was

surprised at the change in the expression of his face, when he came back to her.

"I think you are right about Sydney," he said quietly; "a year or two hence it might have been different; now I think it would be cruel to place her in a position of responsibility, for which she is unprepared. My first thought was right. I shall go up to town to-morrow to see Lord Mertown, and explain as much as is needful of my reasons for refusing."

"Yet the thought of your giving up such a chance—a chance that cannot be expected to come twice in a lifetime—is quite intolerable to me. Could you not go out alone to India, leaving Sydney with me for a year or so, and then ——"

Colonel Edgecombe shook his head; but before Mrs. Edgecombe had time to finish her sentence, the door of the room, which had been a-jar, was pushed further open and Sydney came in.

"What can you have been talking about so long," she said, in a sharp, pained voice. "I knocked twice, and you took no notice. Dinner has been ready downstairs for half-an-hour, and I am quite tired of waiting."

"Come and hear what we have been talking of," Colonel Edgecombe said. "Here is a letter I want you to read, which I was just going to bring down to you."

"No, no, not now," Sydney said, shrinking away; "it is too late, and I am tired. Surely we have all had talk and business enough for one day. Do come downstairs to dinner. I have grown nervous with being so long alone, and can't bear to hear any more to-night."

In the moment during which she had stood at the door, she had overheard some words of Mrs. Edgecombe's last speech—"India, and leave Sydney with me." They seemed to confirm her very worst fears; for surely her husband would not think of inflicting so dreadful a punishment as leaving her alone at High Combe, and going back to India, unless he had heard something against her that he considered beyond forgiveness. She gave herself an evening of terrible pain, by keeping out of the way of explanation, and refusing to be drawn into conversation under plea of overwhelming fatigue.

Colonel Edgecombe was busy discussing the state of the Red Hill Mine, and making out an estimate of the expenses of repair with the Engineer, who had to leave Combe early the next morning, or he could not have failed to observe the feverish state of musing she was in.

CHAPTER XIII.

Therefore who women doth accuse
Of any double intention,
To speaké rown, other to muse,
To pinch at their condition,
All is but false collusion.
I dare right well the soht express
They have no better protection,
But shroud them under doubleness.

Chaucer.

O if thou knew'st how thou thyself dost harm,
And dost prejudice thy bliss, and spoil my rest !!

Earl of Sterline.

SYDNEY had an overpowering headache the next morning, and did not rise till the middle of the day. When she entered the library about an hour before Colonel Edgecombe was to start for London, she found him busy at his desk with a pile of papers before him. He left off writing to put a chair for her by the fire, and condole with her about her headache; but the tenderness of his manner did not entirely reassure her. She perceived something unusual in it, and could not

divest herself of the notion that he was preparing her for some terrible communication he had to make.

"Your mother says you are going to London, and you have never told me," she said, cutting short his anxious remark upon her pale looks.

"Only because you appeared so unequal to hearing," he answered. "I came up-stairs several times to speak to you, and you seemed to be asleep."

"I should have got up sooner if I had known you were going away. It is very hard that I should always be the last person in the house to know what is going on. I often think I might just as well be away; it would not make any difference to you or anyone."

Sydney's habit of indulging in vague, exaggerated complaints was a great trial of temper to her husband. The remembrance of his last night's resolution kept him from making a contemptuous answer; but it did not prevent his face clouding and his manner stiffening, as, drawing a chair near hers, he took the letter he had received the evening before, from the table, and proceeded to explain its purport to her. She listened with a pre-occupied, distrustful mind, too full of the expectation of hearing some ulterior design respecting herself brought forward at the end of his discourse, to perceive how very much importance her husband attached to

the proposal that had been made to him. When he had finished speaking, Colonel Edgecombe gave her the letter, and watched her face rather anxiously as she read. There lurked at the bottom of his mind a sort of hope, that she might at this crisis of their lives show herself possessed of more care for his reputation, and greater capacity for entering into his views, than he and his mother had last night given her credit for. Should she herself urge him to accept the appointment, and show a fitting sense of the responsibility they would share together, it might become right to re-consider his last night's decision. The exact meaning of the letter dawned slowly on Sydney. When she had come to the end she looked up with a puzzled face.

"Is it the same Lord Mertown who stayed two days here last August that writes to you?"

"Yes, Lord Mertown was here in August. I think you rather liked him."

"No, I did not; I disliked him particularly. He had a wart on the left side of his nose, which wrinkled up oddly when he spoke. I do think he was the very ugliest man I ever saw in my life. I am sure I would not pay any attention to what he advises, if I were you."

"My dear Sydney, never mind Lord Mertown's ugly-

ness; it has surely nothing to do with the purport of his letter."

"Oh! I think nothing of the letter. It is just nonsense. He writes as if he thought so highly of you, and yet he wants you to go all the way to India, and do a great deal of difficult work, and be exposed to great danger. Why should he want you to go? You can stay very comfortably at home; and surely there must be people badly enough off not to mind going so far, and working so hard."

"You have no wish to see me Governor of S——?"

"No, not if being Governor obliged you to leave High Combe, and live in India. I should think you very silly if you went there, and very unkind to me."

"Well, give me the letter back. I have made up my mind to decline the appointment. I am going to London to-day to see Lord Mertown about it. He is an old friend of my mother's, and deserves a more private explanation than I can give in writing."

Sydney felt that she had displeased her husband; and, not at all understanding what she had done amiss, an added sense of discomfort and perplexity came over her.

He returned to his writing-desk, and she sat and watched him, as he arranged and folded papers, with

a very miserable expression on her white face, wondering what all the excitement meant, and to what end it tended.

By-and-bye he got up to leave the room, with a letter he had just folded and sealed in his hand.

"I will come back to say good-bye," he said. "I must find my mother and get her to take charge of this letter."

"What is it?" Sydney said. "Why can't you as well give it to me? Why do you make such mysteries of everything to-day?"

He came back from the door to her seat, touched by the anxious, frightened look in her eyes. "My dear child, it is you who are mysterious," he said. "There is nothing particular in this letter: it is to Mr. Franklyn, and has the engineer's report of the state of the works at Red Hill in it, and a money enclosure. I am anxious it should not be lost, and I want my mother to take charge of it, that's all. Rolla Franklyn is to call for it this evening."

"Oh, but if that were all, why could not you have given it to me? You never seem to think I can do anything."

Colonel Edgecombe's face flushed at the implied disbelief of his statement. "Look at the letter for yourself," he said, showing her the address. "It is nothing

to me who takes care of it, so long as it is safely delivered. There! I have put it inside my desk ; don't forget where it is, or leave it about. There are five hundred pounds in it—half the sum I am advancing Mr. Franklyn for the repair of the works at Red Hill."

"Five hundred pounds! that's a great deal more than George asked you for. I wish that was for George!"

"You don't know how you pain me by recurring to that subject so often, Sydney. Can't you believe me when I tell you that I should not really serve George, but only the rogues who are preying upon him, by giving him money now. You may depend upon my doing all I can for him when I see a way. Can't you trust me at all, Sydney?"

He went and knelt down by the side of her chair as he spoke, and she took his hands and clung to him nervously.

"Stay with me till you go," she whispered. "Don't go and talk to your mother. I know she wants to persuade you to be unkind to me."

He yielded, seeing how excited she was ; but his heart sank within him. This timid, clinging, unreasonable child, however loveable she might be, was not the wife whom a husband could confidently place in cir-

cumstances requiring exceptional judgment and resolution. There was no doubt now what the purport of his London journey must be.

Sydney would hardly let him go when the carriage came round.

"I am only going to London for a week, not to India," he said; and she detained him so long, that at last he had to hurry away, leaving only a farewell message for his mother, which Sydney undertook to deliver.

Mrs. Edgecombe was not particularly well-pleased when she came downstairs a few minutes after her son's departure, and found he had, almost for the first time in his life, left the house without bidding her good-bye.

"Such an extraordinary thing," she kept saying; "for we had so much to talk of, so many important questions to settle. I cannot, in the least, understand it."

Sydney grew nervous again under the enquiring, displeased looks that were turned on her, and to escape them she went out to walk to Combe Manor, though the prospect of a visit there did not afford her much pleasure, as she had to tell Lizzie of the failure of her pleadings with Colonel Edgecombe on George's be-

half. Reproaches from Lizzie were just then more tolerable than questions and enquiring looks from Mrs. Edgcombe.

Lizzie was seated at a window overlooking the entrance-gate, evidently on the watch for some one, when Sydney came up to the house, and she hurried out to the gate herself to let her in.

"I am glad you have come to-day," she said, eagerly. "I have been hoping for you. If you had not come, I must have gone up to High Combe myself, though I am sure I have no heart to stir a step from home to-day."

"Why, is anything the matter?" Sydney asked. "Are any of the children ill?"

"No, not the children. Come in here and I will tell you;" and then Lizzie led the way into the sitting-room, and shut the door carefully behind them, with an air of grim mystery that made Sydney's heart sink.

"It's not the children," she said, "and it's not illness. I wish it were; for that would be a straightforward trouble, and I should know what it meant and what to do in it. It's George. To think that a man of his age, and the father of six children, should go and put himself in other people's power, and bring such misery upon us all, as he is doing now. I was speaking my mind to him pretty plainly this morning, telling him

how much I thought he was to blame, and how he ought to be ashamed to look his father and the children in the face, and he took what I said very much amiss ; he went out before breakfast, and now it's long past dinner-time, and he has not come back yet. I was watching for him." Lizzie's thin lips twitched and her eyes wandered restlessly to the window as she spoke.

"Oh ! Lizzie," Sydney said, "I am sorry you spoke so harshly to George. You know it never did answer to vex him too far. He is just the person to do something desperate in a sullen fit. I am afraid you have done a great deal of harm."

"You are a poor one to come to for comfort," Mrs. George answered ; and then she resumed her seat by the window, seized her work, and began drawing the needle out with quick, impatient twitches.

"I wish I had anything comforting to say," Sydney went on, "but I have not. Has anything fresh happened that made you speak to George this morning ?"

"Yes, there is something fresh ; but I don't understand what it is. I know nothing of their affairs,—his and Fowler's, I mean,—except what they choose to tell me, and that you may be sure is little enough. All yesterday, till evening, George seemed in unusually

high spirits. He told me (not that I believed him much) that he saw a prospect of being clear of all his difficulties in a day or two. This horse of his, that he and Fowler talk so much about, is to run at Chester races to-morrow, and they expect to win a great deal of money. George promised me it should be his last venture if he succeeded as he expected this time, and I really think he meant what he said. But late last night, Mr. Fowler came; and he and George were closeted together for two hours. I heard their voices long after I was upstairs, sometimes very low and anxious, and sometimes loud, as if they were quarrelling. When George came up at last, his face was as white as a sheet, and he told me that if he could not get four or five hundred pounds to-morrow, he should be a ruined man, and must leave England. I wanted him to go to Colonel Edgecombe, and he hesitated. He said he had been refused once, and he could not make up his mind to ask a favour again. I told him after such folly as his, he had no right to be fastidious; that was what we quarrelled about."

"I am afraid he would not have gained much by going to Colonel Edgecombe," Sydney said, sadly. "He has resolved not to help George any more, till all connection between him and Mr. Fowler is ended."

"The help will come too late if he waits for that," Lizzie said. "Let George once get it into his head that he is disgraced in his own set, and he will leave the country and never show his face here again. There is that sort of obstinate pride in him. If you considered your own interest only, Sydney, you would not let your husband interfere between George and Fowler. You might know by this time how spiteful his wife is. It would be only like her to pay you back by interfering in her turn. How should you like your husband to hear the whole story of your engagement to poor John Humphreys, and read the letters you wrote to him?"

"The letters!—but how could he see them? Mr. Humphreys gave them back to me. Oh, Lizzie! you don't mean that anyone has them still?"

"Well, it's best for you to know the whole truth, and be on your guard. I found the letters throwing about, and kept them; and once, when Jane and Caroline Humphreys were spending a day here, I brought them out just for amusement, and Caroline put them in her pocket, and has never let me have them since."

"Lizzie, how cruel of you to let her have them."

"I don't say it was right; but a saint would have

been vexed to see how set-up you were the first months after your marriage. I could not stand it, nor the Humphreys' either. We were saying that people who climb so high are sure to have a fall, and that made me think of the letters. I did not mean to harm you."

"But, oh! how it has harmed me. I never quite knew what the Humphreys' meant by their hints of what they could do against me; but I believed them and was afraid, and all my trouble has come from that."

"Other people have heavier troubles than you," Lizzie said, gloomily; and then she turned to the window and resumed her anxious watching of the gate.

Very little more was said, the two women sat and watched together, and started whenever a man's figure appeared at the turn in the lane, and sighed when it proved not to be the one they wanted. They shared the same anxiety, but they could not show sympathy to each other, for each was busy with the thought that her own share was so much the greater that the other's was hardly worth considering.

It seemed quite a simple thing to Sydney to bear a trouble, which did not involve concealment, and was

not embittered by remorse. She looked round the little room and wondered how she could have been unhappy in it, in the days when she had nothing to hide from anyone, and no disclosure to dread. It would have seemed the height of luxury to her now, to sit in that window-seat and sew all the evening quietly, and hear her father tell long stories, and George laugh and romp with the children, and Lizzie scold them all. High Combe, with Mrs. Edgecombe's jealous eyes watching her, was the torture-place now. Yet the thought of anything happening to banish her from her husband's presence was worse torture still.

The evening began to close in, and Sydney was obliged to set out on her road homewards, without hearing any tidings of George. She hardly knew what apprehensions were in her mind as she hurried through the wood, and when, on emerging from the trees, the first object that met her eyes was George's well-known figure, coming slowly down the garden-path from the house, she experienced the sudden revulsion of feeling from anxiety to anger, which comes with the discovery that one has suffered from groundless fears.

Hurrying to meet him, with more indignation against him for keeping so long away from home than satisfaction at his safety,—“Oh, George!” she said,

"how can you make Lizzie so anxious? Why don't you go home?—she has been expecting you all day."

"It's a chance whether I ever go back there again," he answered, sullenly; and Sydney being now quite close to him, had a glimpse into his face, which he tried to turn away from her, and was struck dumb by its haggard, downcast look. She slipped her hand under his arm, and tried to draw him back towards the house.

"No, not that way," he said. "I have been lurking about in the woods, trying to screw up courage to speak to your husband. I went to the house and asked for him an hour ago, and heard he had started for London."

"It is only for a week—he will be back on Saturday," Sydney said, soothingly.

"It might as well be a hundred years hence for me. I shall be far enough away from here by then. If I can't get the money I came to ask your husband for, by eight o'clock to-night, I am a ruined man. I shan't stay here to involve others in my disgrace; no one can harm the children and Lizzie as long as my father lives, and I shall be best out of the way."

"Oh, George, how can you talk so? Where can you go?"

"It won't matter. To America, to the diggings, anywhere where I can get myself killed the soonest. Lizzie won't break her heart about that, will she?" he asked, with a bitter laugh.

"But our father—surely he would help you; surely he would rather part with everything he has than with you?"

"He has helped me all he can, and it is like asking his life. I can't do it."

"Oh, dear! what a pity it was you ever had anything to do with Mr. Fowler again," Sydney said, helplessly. "He had done you so much harm before, and we all warned you."

"You need not strike a man when he is down," George answered. "You are as bad as Lizzie. What's the use of reproaches when one's got to such a pass as this? You ought not to turn upon me, Sydney; for I don't believe I ever should have fallen in with Fowler again if it had not been for your marriage. You held yourself so far above us at first that there was no comfort in going to you, and the house without you was unbearable. I was driven to seek some fresh companionship, and he came first. I only hope he and his wife won't wreak their vengeance on you when I am gone."

"How dreadful it all is," Sydney said, shuddering

and clinging to her brother's arm. "Oh! George, go back a little way with me. I want to think."

She drew him along the path till they were opposite the house, and then stood still with her hand on his arm.

"How much is it you want?" she said.

"I could make four hundred pounds do. Could you possibly let me have it now? I could explain all to Colonel Edgecombe when he came back—return the money to him most likely, with thanks for having saved me."

"And you are sure it would save you—sure it would prevent your having to go away?"

"If I have it before to-morrow I shall be free. I will break with Fowler. I will accept all Colonel Edgecombe's conditions then."

George's face lost its sullen expression; a painful, intense eagerness came into his eyes, and Sydney felt his arm tremble.

"Wait a minute for me here," she said.

The conservatory door, which was straight before them, stood open; she ran up the steps, and entered the library. No one was there. Colonel Edgecombe's desk, with all the papers lying about, was just as he had left it. She raised the lid, took out the letter

directed to Mr. Franklyn, tore it open with trembling hands, and seized a roll of notes that lay in it.

"They are my husband's. I am only borrowing them for a few days, the delay won't matter to Mr. Franklyn as it would to George," she said, to console herself; and then she ran back to where her brother was standing, and thrust the packet into his hands.

"I am running a great risk for you, George," she said, piteously. "I am afraid it's a very wrong thing I am doing, and that it won't turn out well."

But George threw his arms round her and whispered, hoarsely, that she was saving his life and his reason, and she felt her cheek wet with sudden tears.

One moment the paroxysm of emotion, so strange in a reserved man like George, lasted, and then he hurried away down the walk, and she had to return into the dining-room alone.

The sight of the open desk and the torn envelope was a great shock to her. It made her understand fully what she had done. She stood with the letter in her hand staring at the direction, till the sound of Mrs. Edgecombe's voice and step, approaching from the drawing-room, roused her, and then, with the instinct of concealment, which had become, alas! natural to her, she thrust it into her pocket.

Rolla Franklyn's face appeared behind Mrs. Edgecombe, who was speaking to him as they entered the room together.

"I am quite ashamed to tell you," she was saying, "that in the overwhelming interest of a letter that came last night, I quite forgot to ask Walter to tell me the result of his visit to Red Hill. I forgot that he had been there, and I am almost afraid that he must have forgotten it himself. Mr. Henderson, the engineer, has left Combe, and, I fear, without writing out any estimate or report for you. I have seen nothing of one, at least. Sydney, do you know whether Walter left any packet or letter for Rolla Franklyn?"

Sydney did not answer ; but she helped Rolla to turn over the papers on the desk and to search every receptacle in the library where letters were ever placed, till Mrs. Edgecombe observed how pale she was, and sent her up-stairs to lie down, with a kindly but dictatorial reproof for taking a long walk when she had a headache, and staying out so late on a chill March afternoon.

CHAPTER XIV.

Then like a long-forgotten strain
Comes sweeping o'er the heart forlorn
What sunshine hours had taught in vain,
Of Jesus suffering shame and scorn,
As in all lowly hearts He suffers still,
While we triumphant ride and have the world at will.
Christian Year.

It was a positive relief to Sydney to find herself so ill during the next two or three days as to be really incapable of writing to tell her husband what she had done. She knew she ought to write; she saw quite plainly that immediate confession was the only possible way of lessening the wrong she had committed, and she thought she was fully prepared to take it. Yet, whenever she made an effort to lift her head from the pillow, and a fresh pang forced her to lay it back again, she felt glad, almost thankful, to be deprived of the power she dreaded to use. It was so much easier to her to lie there and suffer than to take a resolution and act. She had disliked pain as much as any one, and

been very impatient of it at one time, but now it seemed to her as if a whole lifetime of passive suffering would be a boon, if she might have it in exchange for the necessity of making the confession that was before her. Her fear of her husband had not in any degree lessened her love or admiration of him ; during the last year, since the novelty of her new position had worn off, and she had found to her surprise that outward prosperity could not make her happy, her heart had been turning to him with a deeper feeling than she had ever known before. She was waking out of her childishness to higher thoughts of love and life, yet only, as it seemed now, that she might understand more clearly what she had forfeited and how deeply she had sinned.

As she lay, suffering silently, during those three days of pause, while her mind was too weak for connected thought, recollections of trifling incidents of past years kept floating up before her. Oftenest came a vision of a day she had spent with Miss Arnays and Clemency when she was quite a child — of the sunny, peaceful, flower-scented room where she and Clemency had played, of a kind face looking on at them, and afterwards of stories told in a soft low voice, and of a picture shown to illustrate the story, a picture of a sorrowful, tender, thorn-crowned head and face, which floated up

again and again before Sydney's eyes, as plainly as if she had seen it only yesterday. As she thought of it a great yearning came over her. If only she might never have to face a human judgment, but lie where she was just a little longer, and then slip away and carry the burden of her sins, and incapacities, and sorrows, to be exposed to Him only, to receive His sentence. Would He, even in His tenderness, exact from her any punishment as hard as this of confessing her sin to her husband, forfeiting his love, and enduring his mother's scorn.

Sydney remembered the majesty as well as the tenderness of the face, and thought perhaps He might; perhaps He was setting her the task now by keeping her here, and she could only win her way to Him through that path of humiliation and pain. A terrible fit of weeping came over her as she reached this conclusion, but the first real cry for help to conquer her weakness rose with it from her heart.

Mrs. Edgecombe was very much puzzled by Sydney's extreme depression of spirits. She pitied her evident suffering, and at first came often to see her, and waited on her zealously; but when all her efforts were met with averted looks and weakly plaintive entreaties to be left alone, she grew provoked, and could not suppress some rather indignant remonstrances. Her

mind was full of the sacrifice her son was making for Sydney's sake, and it did seem out of place to her that Sydney should act the part of the aggrieved person just at that juncture. If she must stand in the way of her son's advancement and spoil his life, she might at least refrain from making the home to which she tied him gloomy, by giving way to such distressing and unaccountable fits of despondency.

So Mrs. Edgecombe thought. Her words, not loud-spoken or angry, but weighted with a certain emphasis of tone which would have made them sink deep at another time, floated round Sydney, as she lay, like idle wind, or fell like the gentle patter of rain, on one who was watching an angry sea rising to overwhelm her.

The hope of hearing news of George, made Sydney exert herself to come down-stairs on the fourth day of her husband's absence. Colonel Edgecombe was expected home the next day. Sydney had ascertained so much from the letters she had received from him ; but she could not make up her mind to read them through, for fear there should be any direct mention of the packet he had left for Mr. Franklyn.

She took up her pen to write to him ; but, after the address, no words would come. She had so seldom had occasion to write to her husband, that a letter to him

was still a formidable undertaking; now it seemed simply impossible. She could not invent any commonplace phrases, and when she thought of writing what she really had to say, her hand trembled and blotted the paper.

Lizzie came in during the afternoon and brought her a letter from George, which had been enclosed to her. It was short, but very kindly worded, and, on the whole, gave Sydney comfort, though the news it contained had a doubtful complexion. He had been somewhat less successful than he had expected, he wrote, but there were still (as usual with George) other chances and hopes that kept up his spirits. He could not yet fix a time for returning home; but hoped that when he did come back at last, he should be in a position to give up for ever the harassing schemes in which he was now entangled.

Lizzie shook her head gloomily over the note. "It always is next time with George," she said.

But to hear Lizzie talk despondingly even was a relief to Sydney after her long enforced silence on the subject that occupied her thoughts incessantly. She actually clung to Lizzie, and would not let her go till quite late—till the post-hour was passed, and she had lost her opportunity of writing to Colonel Edgecombe.

How she grudged afterwards that waste of the hours when she still might have written.

Mrs. Edgcombe urged her to take a walk the next morning to brighten up her cheeks before Colonel Edgcombe arrived.

"You look positively wizened with cold or something this morning, my dear," she said. "Walter will wonder what in the world I have been doing to you. Look across into the mirror at yourself and me as we stand together. It is you who look sixty this morning. It makes me quite miserable to see you so. Do try what a little fresh air will do for you."

Sydney made no objection ; one place was much the same as another to her that day. She walked up and down for more than two hours on the terrace before the house, feeling, now that she had come out, as if it would be almost impossible to enter it again. The garden-beds were gay with flowers opening out their hearts wide in the sunshine, the trees and shrubs were showing the new life striving within them, their branches standing out, full and with a faint tinge of fresh green on them, against the pale-blue sky. Everything seemed to breathe out a subdued gladness, something that was not peace exactly, there was too much stir and movement in it, and that yet had not the full note of joy. It

was the soft little lullaby-song, expectant, satisfied, which the half-awakened earth sent up to the sun who was calling her into active life after her long rest. Hitherto Sydney had been deaf to the voice of Nature; it had never, as yet, had anything to say to her: but to-day some of its undertones reached her sore heart. It was not the highest message speaking through outward forms, of the Spirit underlying and supporting them all, she heard—it was that earthlier call which so often comes to us, when the pulse of hope is beating low in our hearts, and which makes us yearn to escape out of our restless, conscious life, into Nature's unconscious, restful yet active, calm—the voice which was speaking to Keats when he longed to feel the violets growing over him.

Sydney did not know how to put her sensations into words; but she felt as if the upward-swelling, green fields, and the overhanging, pale sky, drew her towards them, and entered into her, as they had never done before. She discovered that there was something out of the sphere of her own thoughts and knowledge that was yet akin to her, and could come near and soothe her. So much as that she had not experienced before.

When she returned to the house, Mrs. Edgcombe prevailed on her to rest on the sofa in the library,

and there, utterly worn out with all the emotions she had undergone during the last few days, she fell into a sleep which lasted some hours. She woke with the nervous start that often ends a day-sleep. She saw by the light that it was already late, and her heart sank at the thought of how near the dreaded time had come. She began to calculate how many hours she might hope to have after her husband's return before he would be likely to question her about Mr. Franklyn's letter. She thought she must have at least one hour to see him look and hear him speak in his usual way, before she told her story. She had resolved to tell it all now from the very beginning—all that she had ever concealed—and perhaps change him to her for ever. The one hour began to fill up a larger space in her thoughts than all that was to come after, and, instead of dreading, she grew impatient for her husband's return. The only terrible fear she now had, was that anything should delay his coming till after he had found out what she had done, and she should never have that one hour. As she thought, it dawned upon her that there was an unusual stir going on in the house. She had heard a rumble of wheels outside, and a hasty passing to and fro of feet in the hall, on first waking; but it had not made any impression on her; the sounds

had all gone to increase a nervous sense of apprehension, that had come over her, but she had not reflected on them till now. Could Colonel Edgecombe have arrived sooner than he was expected, and be keeping away from her? She had just started up from the sofa, when Mrs. Edgecombe entered the room with her outdoor dress on, and a thick veil falling over her bonnet so as almost to hide her face.

"Stay where you are a moment longer, my dear," she said. "I have come to speak to you."

Sydney sank back upon the sofa as if she had been shot. Mrs. Edgecombe's voice was full of tenderness, but there was something strange and hollow in it, and her lips moved vaguely as if it required a strong effort to force them to form the words.

She took a seat by the sofa, and lifted up her veil, and Sydney saw how white and rigid her face was.

"Has Walter come?" she asked, faintly.

"No, not Walter. My love, you must try to be calm and brave, if you mean to come with me to him. Your maid has brought your bonnet and warm cloak into the hall ready to put on, and the carriage will be at the door in a minute. By driving very quickly we shall catch the last train."

"But, oh! what is the matter?—what has he heard?
—Is he so angry that he won't come home?"

Mrs. Edgecombe's face quivered with pain as she answered:

"He set off to come home this morning. There has been an accident on the railroad. A telegram has just arrived. Walter is injured—very much injured. The telegram is not from him, but from some one who recognized him, and who is staying with him at the village inn to which he has been taken, till we can come. My dear, there is no time to lose; the last train starts in an hour. I must go to him at once. Would you rather wait here till I can telegraph how I find him? Think what you will do."

Sydney sat upright on the sofa with clasped hands, and eyes fixed stupidly on the opposite wall. She could not think; there was nothing in her mind but a horrible sense of having been overtaken by a deserved punishment, from which there was no escaping. She was not to have the one hour she had been reckoning on, and this was what had happened to prevent it.

Mrs. Edgecombe sat patiently for some minutes, watching for the white lips to form some words; then tried to rouse her by wrapping round her the shawl and cloak she had brought, and putting her bonnet on

her head ; but it was useless preparation ; when Sydney came out of her stupor, it was to fall into a violent fit of hysterics, from which there was no chance of her being recovered in time to travel to London that night.

Mrs. Edgecombe had to set off on her sad journey alone, after scribbling and despatching a hasty note to Clemency Franklyn, to entreat her to come to High Combe and stay with Sydney till Colonel Edgecombe's state was ascertained, or Sydney sufficiently calm to take her place with his mother by his sick-bed.

CHAPTER XV.

I have led her home, my love, my only friend.
There is none like her, none.
And never yet so warmly ran my blood
And sweetly, on and on,
Calming itself to the long-wished-for end,
Full to the banks, close on the promised good.

MRS. EDGECOMBE'S note entreating Clemency to go to High Combe reached her on a day that had brought some agitating events to her also. It was a half-holiday with the children at the Red House, and they had coaxed Clemency to take them for a long walk through the fields to Tunstall, where they wanted her advice and assistance in making some important purchases in anticipation of a coming birthday. The walk was a very gay one, but when the party reached the toy-shop at Tunstall, which was nearly opposite Aunt Bessie's old house, a little difficulty arose: it was suddenly remembered that the birthday-child, the youngest boy, must not witness the purchasing of his own presents, and as Clemency had undertaken not to lose sight of him

during the whole expedition, the children had to choose between conflicting advantages. Since no entreaties would induce Clemency to go back from her word, it was settled at last that the little girls must enter the shop alone, while Clemency and little Harry walked up and down the opposite side of the road, out of sight of the tempting toys, and close enough to the railing of Mr. Yonge's large garden to give them something agreeable to look at. That garden was once more the pleasantest spot in Tunstall. The old forlorn willows that used to overhang the entrance-gate had been blown down, and their places were filled with rare flowering shrubs. The once-tangled lawn was carefully kept, and the borders were already gay with early flowers. Clemency lifted her little brother on to the third bar of the gate that he might smell a branch of mezereon in flower that hung near it, and he discovered so many new and curious objects to ask questions about, that she could not persuade him soon to abandon his elevated position. The little girls came up with their purchases in their hands, while he was still on the gate, and they stood in a group round, looking in ; very unwilling to be ordered to move away, for the miser's garden was still held, at least by the children, to be a mysterious spot which only a few privileged people had

ever been allowed to investigate thoroughly. Clemency's stories of old make-believes, in which she and Arthur had joined, had given some colour to the fancy.

"Is that little winding walk among the shrubs, bordered with double lilac primroses, really the road that used to lead to peacock-king's palace, Clemency? and do you suppose the palace is still at the end of it?" the little girl asked eagerly; and just as Clemency turned her head to look, Miss Emily Wilson emerged from among the trees and approached the garden-gate. Before Clemency could disengage little Harry's sturdy hands from clinging to the upper bar, and get her party together, Miss Wilson had come up to them.

"Pray don't move away," she said. "Were the children looking at the flowers? May they not come in?"

She opened the gate wide as she spoke, the children rushed in with a shout of exultation, and Clemency, not daring to lose sight of them, was obliged to follow.

"Now do show us Beauty's house, and the cave of the Forty Thieves, and the little wicket-gate, and the Palace Beautiful!" the children clamoured.

Miss Wilson seemed a little amused, but more puzzled, at the odd jumble of associations, with which their exact knowledge of places they had never seen, was mixed.

"Do you think it wise to let children's minds run upon mere fancies?" she said. "I am disposed to consider imagination a dangerous gift. I often tell Mr. Yonge, I think it is a snare to him to have so much of it."

Clemency somehow did not feel disposed to discuss Mr. Yonge's character with her present companion. Altered as all her old garden-haunts were, they called up associations that disposed her to be silent; and Miss Wilson continued, as they walked, to bring out anecdotes of Arthur or of old Mr. Yonge, showing an intimacy with all the doings in and out of the house, which was (though she could not account for the feeling) rather depressing to Clemency. She explained the reasons for all the alterations—how Mr. Yonge had spared one old tree, because his mother had been used to sit under it, and ordered another to be cut down that his grandfather's wheel-chair might be taken completely round the lawn, and she informed the children that they might gather any flowers they liked, except those on the borders by the south wall, which were to be kept for the Easter decorations of the new Vale Combe church and school-room.

Clemency did not wish her sisters to gather any flowers, but Miss Wilson calmly insisted.

"Oh, yes; Mr. Yonge liked the flowers to be gathered.

She had leave to bring in two of her best Sunday-scholars from Vale Combe, every summer Sunday afternoon to gather flowers. It was a reward very much prized by her rough scholars, and had a civilising influence. It was Mr. Yonge's idea."

"But we are not Vale Combe Sunday-scholars, and have no right to such a reward," Clemency objected.

"Oh, never mind, you will be just as welcome," Miss Wilson assured her.

"Just as welcome!" Clemency was angry with herself for thinking the words over, and feeling sore about them.

When they came near the house, Miss Wilson asked if she would not come in and see old Mr. Yonge.

"He will not know who you are," she explained; "for he is very misty in his thoughts to-day; but he always likes to see people, even strangers. We—my sisters and I—call, one of us, every afternoon to see him; sometimes we read aloud, and it is a pleasure to the poor old man to listen, even when he does not understand all we say. He generally mistakes me for his daughter-in-law, who has been dead so many years, and he is always happy when I am with him."

Clemency did not feel at all disposed to enter the house in the character of a stranger. She excused her-

self by pleading the length of the walk to the Red House, and her fears that the children had already fatigued themselves by running about the garden. She marshalled her troop before her when they turned ; but as she fancied she saw a slight look of disappointment on Miss Wilson's face, she would not quicken her pace, for fear of seeming ungracious.

They walked slowly down the long winding walk, and Miss Wilson, with a little additional gravity in her voice, began to talk about old Mr. Yonge's feeble state of health, and from that, somehow slid into praise of Arthur. How wonderfully patient and kind he was to the querulous invalid, whose companionship would have been such a trial of temper to most men. What a remarkable combination of gentleness and strength there was in his character. How her brother looked up to him, and was guided by his opinion. How people, who had once been prejudiced against him on his grandfather's account, had learned to trust and respect him. It was not often, she observed, that one met with such an instance of what real superiority of character, unaided by outward circumstances, could effect. Her brother always acknowledged his inferiority to Mr. Yonge ; but she must say that she thought it a proof of uncommon qualities in him too, that he should have

discerned Mr. Yonge's great talents and worth so early. She should always be proud of her brother's penetration, and of the zeal and generosity with which he had upheld his friend when other people looked down on him.

Clemency listened, and stole a glance now and then at her companion's composed face. It was all quite simply said. There was not the smallest reproach or inuendo intended in it; it was genuine praise. She tried to acquiesce cordially, but she could not help feeling a little irritated; it was so strange to her. She, who had known him so long, to have his character expounded to her by a comparatively new acquaintance. She might have been blind, yet surely she had always understood it, at least as well as Miss Wilson. It never would have occurred to her to say so solemnly that he was not exactly like other people.

They met Arthur, as Clemency had all along had an uncomfortable prevision they would, entering the garden-gate as they were leaving it. Clemency hardly bestowed a glance on him, she was so occupied in hurrying the children away; yet, in that one glance, she detected a confused, anxious, inquiring look, sent from his eyes to Emily Wilson's. A glance of intelligence she was sure it was, which served to ask—What have you been saying to her? Is it your doing she is here? It

made Clemency's face glow to feel so sure, as that glance caused her to be, that at one time they two must have talked about her together. Little Harry dropped his armful of flowers in the lane, but she would not allow him to stop to pick them up. She walked on without once looking back, as fast as the lagging steps of her little companions would let her. Arthur stopped to exchange a few words with Miss Wilson, and then he followed the Franklyn party, and overtook them just as they were turning out of the road into the field path. Clemency was trying in vain to lift her little brother over the stile; he was too tired and lazy to exert himself; and a great deal too heavy for her to carry. Arthur took him up in his arms and perched him on his shoulder.

"You shall ride across this long field to the next gate," he said. Then turning to Clemency: "Miss Wilson is responsible for letting him tire himself in my garden, against your will, she says. You must let me carry him part of the way home. Your father would not object to seeing him on my shoulder. He and I are better friends now. He has been very kind to me lately; has he not told you?"

"From what Rolla tells me, I gather that it is you who are trying to serve him."

"Not very effectively, so far. The comfort is that he should be convinced at last that there is no necessary ill-will between us. If he did but know the grief and trouble it has been to me to keep out of Rolla's way, while he made it a matter of obedience with Rolla to break with me, he would think I had paid dearly for my sudden prosperity."

There was a short silence; and then Clemency said, rather timidly,—

"I have often wished to tell you how much obliged to you I am, for not allowing Rolla to quarrel with papa on your account. He would have done it, and gloried in the thought of being blamed for holding to an old friend, if you had let him. I think it was finding you considered that he owed entire obedience to papa about giving you up, that made him first see it was his duty to submit in other things."

"I could not have kept out of his way if I had not known that he was generous enough to understand why I did so; that it could never come into his mind for an instant that I had changed towards him. I could not have borne all this long time of keeping away, and never hearing anything of you all, if it had not been for that."

Clemency's conscience would not let her give the answer she saw was expected, so she remained silent; and during

the rest of the walk Arthur talked to the children, pointing out objects in the fields and hedges for them to look at, or answering questions about the mysteries of his garden. He won their hearts completely, and when he lifted little Harry down from his shoulders, after they had passed the last stile, and were within sight of the Red House, they gathered round him, and were very unwilling to let him go. Clemency alone could not say a word; she had been trying to invent friendly and cordial speeches while she walked silently by his side, but nothing she could think of seemed appropriate, either to their old close intimacy, or to the new position of quiet friendliness she was now entitled to take up.

She had been thinking painfully, that after all, in spite of all promises and assurances of unchangeableness, a long breach of intercourse must change; and that, let people say what they would, there was no such thing as taking up a broken intimacy where it had dropped. One might perhaps only find out its full worth when one had lost it; might only begin then to know the light and warmth of the love in which one had lived unconsciously; yet there was no getting back into it when one had once let it slip away.

Arthur left the children, came close up to her, and took her passive hand.

"I have not said yet what I followed you to say," he began; "but I can't go away without. I am uneasy lest my zealous advocate should have injured my cause, instead of advancing it, as she meant to do. I was afraid, directly I saw you two together, that she had been wearying you with talk about me, and she confessed her injudicious good-nature to me just now. I want you to tell me that it has not vexed you. You must remember that the Wilsons are the closest friends I have, and no one could possibly be a close friend to me without divining what my feelings towards you are. How could it be so, when my love for you is the thought that underlies all I say and do. Forgive her for trying to do for me what I should not have ventured yet to do for myself."

"She was very kind; I did not think she had any object in what she said," Clemency faltered. Then meeting an anxious penetrating look that put her in mind of old times, she could not help bursting out, with something of her old frankness, "Yes, you are right. I dare say I did look very cross. I *was* vexed with her; but it was not because she praised you, only for taking it so for granted that I did not know; for seeming to think she could teach me anything about you, whom I have known nearly all my life."

"Yes, it was very presumptuous; you have judged me once, and I have perhaps no right to suppose that there is anything more for you to find out in me—anything for anyone to tell you, that can change your opinion—at all events, not yet; the one thing you don't fully know about me, you don't care for—my love for you."

"That was not exactly what I meant," Clemency said, very low. "But good-bye, now; it is late, and the children must go in."

Arthur had been holding her hand till now. She drew it away quickly, and began to walk across the last field, into which a door of the Red House garden opened. Arthur followed her.

"Nay, you always used to speak out. You must tell me what you did mean."

"How can I?" Clemency said, turning upon him almost with a flash of anger in her eyes. "You go on saying so much about never having changed; how can you expect me to confess that I have changed? You ought not to care for it, either. I don't see how you can. There is nothing in my loving you now, when everyone is liking and praising you. I am angry with myself for seeing so late, and you ought not to care for it. Oh, Arthur! what have I said to make you look so

happy?" She was almost frightened at the expression of wonderful joy that came in his face.

"Do you mean that you have come to love me at last?" he said.

Clemency did not answer for a minute; she was pondering, looking back into the history of her mind for the past two years, and when she was ready to speak she had reached the door, which the children were holding open for her. She held out her hand to say good-bye, and when she felt the strong warm clasp in which it was held, she said, slowly,—

"I can't make it out: I think I must always have loved you a little without knowing it, for it seems already a long time since I did, though you say 'at last.'"

"I may well say at last. I have loved you ever since the first minute I saw you—the day you spoke to me at our gate, when I was a forlorn schoolboy, who had never before known what it was to have anybody to love."

"But you must not boast about that," Clemency said, with a smile that was meant to keep back the tears that were gathering in her eyes. "And, Arthur, though it is like going back home to me talking to you again, yet you know I can never even seem to desert papa, while

he is unhappy, and wants me. They do all want me now at the Red House. Till he is quite reconciled to you, and prosperous again, it seems to me that we are as much divided as we were before."

"Nothing can ever divide us now, after what you have said. You will see; and meanwhile, I shall never ask you to do anything for my sake that you think wrong to him."

"I know you won't," Clemency said. "And now I must go in. See, the children are coming back for me."

They parted at the garden-door; but Arthur turned back after he had gone a step or two, to put into her hands a quantity of flowers he had been carrying for the children.

"Don't let them die," he said, "since they were gathered on such a happy day."

Clemency walked slowly to the house. As she bent her head over the primroses, inhaling their faint perfume, and recalling the look with which they had been put into her hands, she felt almost as if some one had made her a present of Spring—of the Spring-time of hope and joy that had once seemed to die suddenly out of her life. Every trace of old pain was lost in a deeper, wider happiness than she had ever dreamed of before. "One must lose one's life sometimes to find it," she said

to herself. "I should never have known Arthur really, or valued the truth and constancy of his love, if I had not felt the contrast. I might have taken it just as a common gift, as one takes light and air, because it was offered so freely, and I had had it so long."

CHAPTER XVI.

Dare to be true. Nothing can need a ly :
A fault, which needs it most, grows two thereby.

George Herbert.

As soon as Clemency entered the house, Mrs. Edgecombe's hurried incoherent note was placed in her hands, and she had to turn her thoughts from her own new-found happiness, to sympathise with the trouble that had come upon her friends.

An hour after reading the note, she was on her way to High Combe. She found the whole house in confusion, and Sydney lying on her bed in a stupor of exhaustion, which had succeeded to her fit of uncontrollable grief. There was not much to be done for her at first, except to keep her quiet and guard her room from the intrusion of the excited, talkative servants, who seemed to revel in bringing up every exaggerated rumour about the accident, that reached the house, and to be determined to anticipate nothing but the worst tidings.

Clemency sat by Sydney's bed all night ; she had felt a little uneasy lest her presence should be unwelcome ; but her fear was dispelled the first time that Sydney's wandering eyes rested on her with a look of recognition. A faint smile came on her face, and she put out her hand.

"I am glad you are come," she said ; "how good it is of you to come to me." The sad humility of the tone puzzled Clemency very much, and she was surprised and touched to find how timidly and anxiously Sydney clung to her presence, as if she found a kind of protection in it. "I know you will tell me the exact truth," she said, once or twice, "you always did that. I used to think it tiresome when we were children together here ; but now I wish I had always been more like you."

Clemency did her best to raise the sufferer's spirits by encouraging her to hope for better news, and combating what she considered a strangely morbid tendency to regard her husband's absence as if it were a punishment that had come upon her. Sydney seemed to like to hear her talk ; but the purport of her words made little impression. She always returned to her own desponding thoughts again, the minute Clemency ceased speaking.

The first telegram, which arrived early in the morning, only told them that Colonel Edgecombe, though very seriously injured, was still alive, and had recognised his mother. Clemency thought the meagre information so discouraging that she dreaded communicating it, but Sydney heard the telegram read with more composure than she expected. It seemed as if she only then quite understood what had really happened, and the reality was less terrible to her apparently than her vague fears.

"So it is really an accident—really because he is ill that he cannot come," she repeated constantly, and after that, the very wild, frightened look went out of her eyes, and she seemed more capable of receiving hope. Mrs. Edgecombe's letter, when it came, a little later in the day, was full of pity for Sydney; but it did not urge her joining her by her son's sick-bed. There had been several sufferers from the accident, and the little inn, to which those who could not be removed to their own homes had been carried, was much crowded. Colonel Edgecombe had received an injury on the head, the extent of which must remain doubtful for some days. It was of the utmost importance that he should be kept quiet and free from excitement, and Mrs. Edgecombe seemed to have a very poor opinion of

Sydney's capability for being, under such circumstances, anything but an additional anxiety and hindrance to the real watchers. The burden of her first and many subsequent letters, was : "You are better out of the way."

Clemency was surprised at the meekness with which Sydney acquiesced in this verdict; and as one day of suspense followed another, she began to feel a little indignation against Mrs. Edgecombe for so completely setting aside Sydney's claims.

"You have a right to go and nurse your husband—a better right than even his mother to be with him now," she said several times to Sydney, after reading these letters. But once, when she ventured to add, "I think you are strong enough to go to-day, and that you ought to go," poor Sydney fell into such an agony of indecision, fear, and grief, that she was obliged to recall her words, and resolve very firmly not to interfere again.

The days of suspense passed very slowly and wearily. Sydney could hardly ever bear Clemency out of her sight, and during this time of trial a strong affection sprang up between the two, who had never in happy days managed to be friends at all. Whenever Sydney was not hearing Mrs. Edgecombe's last letter read over,

or discussing the more or less hope which each report conveyed, her pleasure was to talk over the very early days when she and Clemency had played frequently together at High Combe, or at the Farm, and spent quiet afternoons together in Miss Arnays' house at Tunstall. These visits had ceased soon after Mrs. George Serle came to the Manor, for her ungracious manners had driven most of the Serles' old friends, and Miss Arnays among the number, from their former habits of intimacy with the family. Clemency was sometimes startled and half shocked, at the bitter tone in which Sydney would speak of the injurious influence her sister-in-law had had upon her life.

"I might have had you for a friend, and been guided by your aunt, if she had not interfered. I used not to be untruthful till I had learned to be afraid of her," she would often say, with such pleading, frightened eyes, that Clemency hardly knew how to answer. She was too sorry for her, to tell her how little use there is in trying to throw the responsibility of one's faults on other people, and she was puzzled by her tone of speaking of the early days, as of an innocent happy time, from which some terrible gulf of wrong doing or suffering separated her.

She tried to hope that her extreme despondency was

the effect of prolonged suspense, and wondered how she could bear it, day after day, and not summon up courage to hasten to the neighbourhood of the sick-bed herself. She saw plainly enough that it was no want of love, or anxiety, or longing to be of use, that held Sydney back ; only an unaccountable self-distrust that paralysed her energy. She could not understand it, but she saw what suffering it was.

"If I were to see him, I must tell him all," Sydney said one day, half-abstractedly, after Clemency had been reading a letter from Mrs. Edgcombe, in which she mentioned that, for the first time, her son had spoken Sydney's name, and appeared surprised at her absence. "I could not see him without telling him ; and he is not to be agitated, you know—it might kill him. I must keep away for fear of that—it is my punishment."

She looked wistfully at Clemency as if she half-wished to be questioned ; but a fear of intruding held Clemency back. She saw that Sydney was not in a state to judge how much she might rightly confide to her, and, instead of encouraging her to open her heart further, she tried that day to occupy her thoughts by commenting on the more decidedly cheerful tone of the letter they had just received, and begged her to hear

again the words which for the first time allowed her to hope.

After that first cheerful letter, the intelligence they received of Colonel Edgecombe was almost always encouraging. He recovered very slowly; and still Mrs. Edgecombe dwelt on the great importance of quiet and freedom from excitement; but in another week or two she assured them all cause for uneasiness would probably be over. He might be an invalid for some time, but there was no longer danger of permanent injury. Mrs. Edgecombe was very strict in preventing him from talking and writing, and, in spite of all the inconvenience of their situation, she was resolutely set against his travelling home an hour before the doctor gave full permission. Clemency could hardly help smiling sometimes when she read her letters—for, now that the worst anxiety was over, it was so evident that Mrs. Edgecombe was enjoying the entire, undisputed possession of her son which her sole attendance gave her. He could not bear much talking, she wrote, but he liked to have her near, and she just sat by his side and watched him, and gave him all he wanted. Years seemed to have rolled back with her: she had got her darling again for a time, almost as entirely, and much in the same way, as when she had watched by his cradle in the High Combe nursery.

"She was not at all tired, she did not want any one to help, and the days passed very peacefully to both of them," she said; yet, in the expansion of feeling, her thankfulness for her son's recovery brought, there were some stirrings of generosity towards Sydney. She could not take the whole of this great happiness of serving to herself, without making a faint show of offering some shreds and parings of it to Sydney.

She began to vary her injunctions about the necessity for quiet with half-grudging invitations to her daughter-in-law to come if she liked.

"You are not wanted; you would be very uncomfortable here, and Walter might be distressed at the thought of your being inconvenienced; yet I don't know that your coming could do any harm now. I think he looks for you sometimes. At all events, you should write. He is anxious at not hearing from you."

Yet Sydney did not write. She used to send Clemency out into the garden almost every day, saying, she was going to write a letter to her husband. Clemency always brought the writing-case to the sofa for her, and encouraged her with affectionate words to make the effort, but on her return she invariably found her sitting in the same attitude, with listless hands hanging down, and eyes vacantly fixed on the empty sheet.

She grew so uneasy about her at length, that she wrote privately to Mrs. Edgecombe, entreating her to return to Combe as soon as possible. Three weeks slipped away in this manner. —The lovely Combe Valley began to wear its gayest dress. Clemency brought very happy looks from her solitary walks up and down the sunny garden-terraces, and Sydney longed to open her heart to let in some of the brightness around her. It seemed so hard that everyone, to the lowest servant in the house, should be at liberty to wear a bright face at the prospect of Colonel Edgecombe's return, and that she should not.

Sometimes she tried, but always in vain, to put the thought of what she had done away from her. In her best moods, when the wish to repair her fault as far as possible was uppermost, the idea of confessing all to Clemency presented itself attractively. It would be an earnest of her resolution to hold back nothing from her husband when he returned ; it would put the possibility of further concealment for ever out of her power ; and then there was something in Clemency that drew her confidence.

Yet perhaps she might never have found resolution to speak, if an accidental turn in the conversation had not given her an opening. Rolla came to see his sister

one afternoon, and they walked up and down the terrace talking for a long time together. Sydney had felt very miserable all day; the weather had changed, and become rather colder than it had been during the last week or two, and her maid had taken out for her in the morning the same dress she had worn on her last walk to High Combe. She had put it on without noticing it; but, by-and-bye, the remembrance flashed across her that her husband's letter to Mr. Franklyn and the torn envelope were still where she had thrust them—in the pocket of the dress. She carried them about with her all day, often putting her hand down to feel if they were safe. She had never been so conscious of the serious nature of what she had done as she was all that day. When Rolla came she could hardly bear his gay, careless talk, and his hearty congratulations on the probability of Colonel Edgecombe's speedy return home. Rolla advised her to expect him every day—every hour; he would be so sure to rebel against his doctors at last, and insist on coming home.

Clemency perceived that, for some reason or other, Rolla's encouragements were having a contrary effect from what he intended; the expression of misery on Sydney's face startled her. She sent her brother out on to the terrace, and before she followed him she placed

Sydney on a sofa near the window, from whence she could watch them as they paced up and down, "and we can come back to you in a moment if you feel the least lonely," she said, kissing her affectionately before she went.

Sydney's eyes followed them in their walk half-unconsciously for a long time, and then she grew a little curious as she observed that the two faces that had been so bright, changed and saddened as the conversation went on. One or two words of their discourse, spoken as they passed the window, reached her ears and vaguely recalled her own secret source of uneasiness. She grew so nervous at last that she went to the window to summon Clemency in, and then Rolla discovered it was late, and that he must hurry home to be in time for dinner. Clemency closed the window after he had gone, and drew the sofa from it.

"The garden is beginning to look gloomy now," she said; "and oh! how cold you are. Let me turn your face to the fire, and ring for lights. I have left you too long alone."

"No, don't ring for lights," Sydney said. "Sit down and talk to me. I only want to hear your voice. Tell me what you and Rolla were talking about: and why it made you both look so grave."

"Oh! Rolla has become so engrossed in business that

he can talk of nothing else in playtime, and even burdens me with his cares," she said.

And then, seating herself by the sofa and taking one of Sydney's hands to chafe in hers, she began, just for the sake of making her voice heard, to repeat some of Rolla's grumblings about the state of things at Red Hill.

"Rolla is more convinced every day of the reality of the danger he and old Evans have long been pointing out, and every day that passes without precautions being taken makes it worse. It weighs on Rolla's mind, because he feels that we are responsible for so many people's lives; and that if an accident does happen we shall be to blame for it, since anyone who chooses to enquire may be convinced of the danger. Mr. Stubbs shuts his eyes wilfully, and my father because he must. Rolla cannot but think that Mr. Henderson must have left some written opinion or paper of suggestions for him. He knows he meant to do so: and such a paper would have been very valuable, even if there had been no letter from Colonel Edgecombe with it. Rolla even thinks that there may have been a letter, and that it may have been mislaid. I should hardly like to think that; it would seem so very provoking. To be sure, no harm has happened yet; but it is like walking on a volcano every day."

She paused, interrupted by the vehemence with which Sydney started from her recumbent position, upright on the sofa, her face very pale, and her eyes wild.

"Mislaid!" she said. "Rolla thinks it might have been mislaid? It might have been, but it was not. Oh! I will not say it was—I will try to speak all the dreadful truth. Clemency, help me. You cannot think how hard it is. Look here!"

She unclosed her hand, in which something had been tightly clutched all the time Clemency had been speaking, and the letter and paper directed to Mr. Franklyn fell into Clemency's lap.

It was a long time before the story could be made plain. At first Clemency was more disposed to think that Sydney's mind was wandering, than that the bitter accusations she poured on herself could have any foundation in fact. Bit by bit, however, by relating one unconnected incident here and another there, and being helped by questions and sudden recollections that Clemency interposed, Sydney was enabled to unravel before her all the tangled web of difficulty and concealment in which she had been involved for so long. Having once begun to open out her heart, Sydney's confession went back very far—to her early

discontents and jealousies of Clemency, and to her day-dreams about High Combe, the first spring after Colonel Edgecombe's return.

"How I used to watch the light from this window," she said, "and picture you here. Yes, I know now that it was all my own doing. I took him from you, Clemency. I see it all now. And you could have made him happy, and I cannot. I don't see that he can ever do anything but despise me now. I shall be a burden to him all his life : a wife he cannot trust, and must despise. I know it is wrong to wish myself dead, but when I think of that I can hardly help it."

"You never must," Clemency said, gently. "You love him now far better than I ever did, and he has always loved you, remember ; you need never think anything else. And when you have had courage to tell him the whole truth, just as you have told it to me, he will not despise you ; he will love you better than he has ever done before, and help you."

"But shall I be able?" Sydney said, "shall I ever have courage to say out all these words? It is easy to speak to you, with your kind hands holding mine, and your kind eyes looking at me ; but if he turns away when I begin, if his eyes flash, as I have seen them flash, when he has only suspected me of telling, an

untruth, ah! what shall I do—how shall I help concealing some little thing that will be the beginning of another misunderstanding?”

“You will be helped,” Clemency said, earnestly. “You must seek higher strength than your own, and it will be given you at the moment of need. Make it a test of your repentance not to let a shadow of false excuse creep in. I think, dearest, this will be a turning point in both your lives, and that greater peace and happiness than you have known yet will come after it, if you are quite true to each other. I hope you will not find the task so dreadful as it looks now. Surely Colonel Edgecombe——”

She paused; she was not confident enough to go on. Was Colonel Edgecombe strong enough, noble enough, to deal rightly in such a trial as this? Would he understand Sydney’s penitence, and help her to rise through it to higher spiritual life? And then Clemency’s thoughts flew off to another person, about whose goodness, under any circumstances, she could never have a moment’s doubt. She could not even imagine a repentant sorrowful person failing to find in him all the forgiveness and tenderness needed, only she hoped that she should never place him in circumstances to call for a special display of that part of his character.

A little time after, when the minds of both were somewhat calmed, it struck Clemency as strange that they should have talked so long and not come to any decision as to the steps they were to take in what, after all, was the most pressing part of the business, the delivery of Colonel Edgecombe's letter and the report, to her father.

Sydney could not bear the thought of taking charge of them again; and as Colonel Edgecombe's return was uncertain, Clemency undertook to place them in her father's hands at once, without giving any explanation as to the cause of the delay or the absence of the bank-notes from the letter.

Sydney was nervously anxious to fulfil as much as remained in her power of the trust her husband had left with her. Now that she understood Rolla's forebodings, every hour that the letter was detained from Mr. Franklyn seemed to make her guilt greater.

She sealed the envelope again carefully, and gave the packet, and a little note Clemency wrote to her father, to a servant, who had orders to place them in Mr. Franklyn's hands early the next morning.

It seemed the right thing to do. Yet Clemency had a certain misgiving which made her look after the

packet as it was being carried out of the room, and half wish to reclaim it.

The mystery of the delayed letter would, she was sure, excite a great deal of annoyance in her father's mind. She wished she could have consulted Rolla first, or heard Arthur Yonge's opinion of the matter.

CHAPTER XVII.

The waiting human world is near,
Yet farther off than heaven for them
Who bow the doomèd head, to bear
Death's cruel diadem,
With farewell words of solemn cheer,
And love for those who cannot hear.

Gerald Massey.

CLEMENCY'S note to her father reached the Red House early, and was placed in Mr. Franklyn's hands as he was leaving the breakfast-table. He glanced through it quickly, and then handed it to Rolla, while, resuming his seat again, he examined Colonel Edgecombe's letter, and the Engineer's notes enclosed in it. Rolla's comment on Clemency's epistle was a long low whistle, which brought on him a reproof from Mrs. Franklyn, and then he tilted his chair backwards and sat, apparently with his eyes fixed on the ceiling, listening to that lady's comments on his want of manners, but really stealing anxious glances at his father's face as he read. Very ominous clouds gathered there, when Mr. Franklyn turned back to Colonel Edgecombe's letter,

and read it slowly a second time. He pointed out the date to Rolla as he finished.

"Six weeks ago, and this letter, which Clemency implies came to her by some sort of accident, speaks of a large money enclosure, which I have never received. It is a most perplexing and disagreeable business to be mixed up in, and you and Clemency are answerable for it. You took too much upon yourselves in speaking to Colonel Edgecombe. I regret that it was done."

Rolla pursed up his mouth for another whistle, but stopped in time, and followed his father out of the room without saying a word.

"I thought you were not going to the office to-day," Mr. Franklyn said, coldly, when he perceived that Rolla was preparing to accompany him on his daily walk. "It is a holiday, and I don't want you. You talked of taking your fishing-rod to Vale Combe."

"Oh, but I've changed my mind; I'm going with you," Rolla said, indifferently, and when they were out in the road together, he slipped his hand under his father's arm and chattered on in his usual gay unconcerned manner, without being at all thrown back by his father's short ungracious replies, or preoccupied manner. He did not know precisely why he persisted in following his father about, but he felt disinclined to lose sight

of him all the morning. About twelve o'clock, Mr. Franklyn left his desk and put on his hat to go out.

"You are going to Red Hill," Rolla said, quickly.

"Perhaps; I'm not sure. You can finish the letters, and then, as there is not much to do to-day, see the office shut up and go home when you like."

Rolla stood irresolute at the office-door, watching his father till he had got half-way down the street, and then he seized his cap and ran after him.

"I want to go to Red Hill; I want to see old Evans—I do, really," he said, apologetically, when he came up to Mr. Franklyn, panting.

Mr. Franklyn made no objection; he was growing used to having Rolla's companionship thrust upon him, and in reality missed him very much when he did not come. He even opened out, during their long walk to Red Hill, and talked more freely than he had ever done to Rolla about his anxiety, and the additional perplexity which the unaccountable delay in Colonel Edgecombe's letter caused him. Rolla could not bring forward even one conjecture which threw any light on this puzzle; but he had a great deal to say about the mine, and about Mr. Stubbs's mismanagement; and Mr. Franklyn listened for the first time with a disposition to consider his words worthy of attention.

"You can see as well as talk, I perceive," he remarked at last. "Lately I have been in a position which has made me find it best to shut my eyes; there is no use seeing what one is powerless to remedy."

By the time they reached the mine, Rolla had talked his father into a resolution to face his difficulties, and act for himself whatever the consequences might be.

There was not a great deal going on at that hour, but there were a few men employed at the bottom of the pit, and the engines were still at work. The chief manager was not to be seen, but Mr. Franklyn had a long interview with the underground manager, Rolla's friend, old Evans, and while they were talking, Rolla, to avoid the temptation of putting in his word too often, wandered among the desolate-looking heaps of refuse at the pit's mouth, and admired the contrast between the grim, coal-blackened, barren hill-side on which he was standing and the bright spring verdure of the sloping fields on the opposite side of the valley.

Red Hill would have been as pretty a place as Combe if men had not spoilt it. The afternoon sunshine was making everything bright, when he saw his father and old Evans walking towards the mouth of the pit. A corfe had just been drawn to the top, bringing

up a party of men from their work, and when they had got out, Mr. Franklyn and Evans took their places. Rolla ran up, just in time to jump in before it began to be let down.

"You surely did not fancy you were going without me," he said.

There was no time for remonstrance ; the corfe began to descend ; the sloping green hill, dotted with sheep, opposite the pit's mouth, seemed to move upwards away from them into the sky ; the sky was one point of blue, then a star ; then the bottom of the corfe grated on the rough floor of the mine, and they were in the underworld of dimly lighted narrow passages and receding caves, and heavy darkness, broken only by moving stars of light glimmering faintly on the heads of the pale-faced workers, who were trooping up various underground ways from the lower rake to the bottom of the shaft. The scene was not at all new to Rolla, but the contrast of the gloom with the full, still, quiet light of the spring afternoon he had just left above, made it more striking than usual.

Mr. Franklyn stayed some time in the first level of the mine, and then they slid down into a still deeper pit, where the men had been working. By that time they had the mine almost to themselves, and some of

the lights fixed here and there at particular parts in the passages had burnt out. There seemed little use in lingering longer ; but Mr. Franklyn was not a man to hasten over anything he once began to do, or to be satisfied with a single inspection when his attention had been roused. He paused, and questioned, and turned back to look again. He and Evans had been standing talking for about five minutes within a few steps of the bottom of the pit, where the lately used tools and last excavated heaps of stone were lying about, when Rolla said, suddenly,

“Take care where you go next; you are stepping into water !”

A loud rushing sound drowned his words, they heard voices calling to them confusedly, they felt water all round them, and the next minute they were struggling for their lives up a steep sloping gallery, towards which Evans dragged them, and which lay at the extremity of the pit, furthest from that at which the water was rushing in. They stumbled and scrambled in the dark, and heard the gurgling of the water as it rose higher and higher in the mine, and swept into the levels. There was a cross-cut from this old incline to the upper gallery of the mine by which they hoped to reach the shaft, but the water was beforehand with them ; the

passage was half full of water when they reached it, and instead of turning in, they had to scramble higher up still. The slope was very steep at last, and ended in a small cavern in the hill-side, which had been excavated and abandoned several years before. Into this, the highest point they could reach for safety, they clambered, and then they were free to give themselves a moment's breathing space. Rolla was the first to speak.

"All right," he said, cheerfully, "we are safe enough here, 'arn't we, Evans? The water won't rise as high as this. How fortunate that there was no one else in the lower rake of the mine! How long shall we have to stay here do you suppose, before any one comes to help us out?"

Neither of the other two answered him. Mr. Franklyn and Rolla had dropped their lanterns in their scramble up the steep incline. Evans had had the presence of mind to keep his in his hand, and save the light from being extinguished either by the water or the rush of air that had come after it. He held it up now, so as to cast as much light as it would give on the place they were in. It was a wide rock chamber with a roof sloping upwards, which had been used till lately to keep spare tools in; a few broken pickaxes leaned against the walls,

and the floor was strewn all over with heaps of stones and refuse. The feeble light of the one candle showed them the dark grey stones of the walls spotted here and there with a damp stain, and revealed the dense darkness hanging overhead. Beyond the cave's mouth lay the still blacker darkness from which they had emerged, only made more palpable by the sickly rays that struggled with and were driven back by it. They could not see, but they felt a movement in the air around, and in every direction there were dull sounds like stones falling, and explosions of pent-up air in far off galleries. Rolla looked and shuddered.

"What a hole! How are we to get out, Evans? How long do you suppose it will be before they can pump the water out so as to get to us?"

"I can't say, sir," Evans answered, gravely shutting his lantern again, and placing it carefully where there was least danger of the draught of air reaching it.

"Is there no communication between this cave and either of the shafts, Evans?" Mr. Franklyn said.

"No, sir; and even if there were, the water will be half way up the shaft by this time. We've got a chance of our lives by coming here, it is a very poor one, but if we had stayed where we were we should have been drowned by this time."

The quiet way in which he spoke had a calming effect on the other two.

"Is there nothing to be done but wait, then?" Rolla said.

"At all events not yet, till we know whether the water has done rising. It may be all over with us in half an hour or so; or we may wait. They will do all they can, but ——"

"I know," interrupted Rolla, quickly; "there is little that can be done. It is at least well that there are only three of us, father; only one life besides our own will be sacrificed; it is better than it might have been."

Mr. Franklyn answered only by a groan, and then he sank down on a heap of stones and dropped his head between his hands helplessly; the other two crouched down close together, Evans putting his arm round Rolla to support him, and they sat thus for a long time listening to the lapping sound of water, which sometimes seemed to come nearer and then to cease its restless movements for a time. Evans went every now and then to the mouth of the cave and looked, and once or twice felt his way a step or two down the incline; the water rose about half way up, but there it stopped, and as the hours went by, he pronounced the danger of its rising higher to have passed, he even thought it had begun to

sink a little. They had no way of counting the lapse of hours, but by the gradual waning of their single candle ; Rolla kept his eyes fixed upon it almost always, but he was seeing all the time the fading of the last rays of sunshine from the hill-side above, and the sparkling up of the lights in distant towns and villages and farm-houses, and the people hurrying homewards to their bright firesides, and the gradual winding-up of the day's work in the upper living world, from which they were shut out by the wall of thick darkness that was closing round them. It seemed to him that the last hope of life would go with the failing of the light that burnt lower every minute. Before it went out he moved from his seat near Evans to his father's side. Mr. Franklyn still sat on the spot where he had first sunk, scarcely moving or speaking, with the air of a person overwhelmed and stunned with pain. Rolla put his hand on him to rouse him.

"Father," he said, gently, "I have not been such a good son to you as I ought to have been."

A strange expression came over Mr. Franklyn's face, he pressed his lips tightly together.

"And I," he said, "and I, what have I done ? what have I been ? what account have I to render ?"

"Let us pray," Evans said, solemnly ; and then they

CLEMENCY FRANKLYN.

all fall on their knees, and the old man's voice rose loud and steady through the deepening darkness, pouring out words of prayer, of confession, of faith, which lifted away the horror of the place they were in, and seemed to bring down into it a living Presence, which made the darkness light, and converted the solitude into a fellowship with all who in peril had cried to the same hearing ear for aid.

After Evans' prayer they did not fall into the stunned silence that had held them before. They sat down together, Rolla holding his father's hand, and talked a little at intervals, Evans being always the chief speaker,—he took the place of leader and teacher now without question. Now and then he repeated a verse of the Bible, and once he woke the dull confusing echo of the cave, by beginning to sing a Methodist hymn in quick lively measure. Rolla's clear, sweet, young voice joined in after the first verse, but Mr. Franklyn sat listening wonderingly, to the strange medley of triumphant words, they chanted;—about harps and crowns, and golden-paved, pearl-gated cities, and endlessly green meadows, and reunions that were to know no parting. A strange medley perhaps they were to one from whom the spiritual meaning conveyed by the metaphorical language was hidden. The

words and the images they brought stirred Mr. Franklyn's heart faintly, like recollections of far back beautiful hopes and dreams of childhood, but he felt parted from them all, parted by a whole lifetime of projects and struggles and plans which had never had the slightest reference to such unsubstantial things. It was clearly enough not so with Evans; the glorious city with its never-withering flowers had been all his life very near and real to him. The dark prison in which they were enclosed might easily be the vestibule to it, from which a door was to open by-and-by to let him in, and the thought of being so near the glory on which he had pondered so long, gave a tone of triumph to his discourse which surprised Mr. Franklyn very much. Rolla seemed to understand the quaint phrases and allegorical descriptions better, and to take a pleasure in listening to them during the long weary dark hours, which might have been any period of time,—minutes, or days, or weeks, for any power they now had of estimating it.

They suffered a great deal from hunger. Evans had a hunch of bread in his pocket, which he divided with his fellow-prisoners. It was long before Mr. Franklyn and Rolla could be persuaded to take their portions from him, but they yielded at last, and

consented that all three should share the same chance of life. They knew that every exertion would be made to draw the water off, so that assistance might reach them, but Evans was also well aware of the great hindrance that the dilapidated state of the works would prove in such an undertaking. The chances in favour of their having found shelter from the water, would seem very small to those above. Their friends would work for the sake of ascertaining precisely what their fate had been, rather than with any hope of being in time to save them from it.

When after many, many hours, sounds reached them which showed that the work above was being vigorously carried on, the waking out of the numbness of despair to the alternating of hope and fear, was almost the worst part of what they suffered, to Rolla and Mr. Franklyn at least, for Evans preserved the same calmness through all. Rolla could no longer sit still in the cave, he groped his way out on to the incline, at the risk of falling into the water, and endeavoured to satisfy himself that the depth of water was really decreasing in the pit. At intervals he and his companions tried to make their voices heard by those who were working above; but the darkness and the thick wall of water that divided them from

those who were struggling to come to their aid, seemed to intercept and give back their cries. For a long, long time no answer came, but confused echoes of their own calls, and the dull plash of the buckets that were let down into the pit and drawn out. Deliverance was coming slowly, very slowly, and their voices were growing every moment weaker, and their strength failing them. At last there came a pause in the sounds caused by the work above, a pause as if all the workers had stopped simultaneously to listen. Once more, with renewed energy, in a last spasm of hope, they called, and, deadened by the water, an answer which was not the echo of their own voices reached their ears.

“It is Arthur Yonge’s voice, father—we are saved!”
Rolla said.

From that moment all anxiety was over for him. The well-known, trustworthy voice was like a bridge from the upper world to the grave in which they lay, and he felt as if they were already lifted out of it. He gathered up his remaining strength to give one answering call, and then the power of further exertion left him, and he sank down to the ground in a state of unconsciousness from which he did not awake for many hours.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“That we would do,
We should do when we would; for this *would* changes
And hath abatements and delays as many
As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents;
And then this *should* is like a spendthrift sigh,
That hurts by easing.”

Shakespeare.

Two days and nights of labour, carried on almost in despair, had been borne by those above before Rolla's call for help, rendered faint and uncertain by the depth from which it came, brought unexpected hope and a fresh spur to exertion. It was some time after the accident happened, before it was certainly ascertained that Mr. Franklyn and Rolla and Evans had not previously left the mine. There were not many people on the hill when the accident occurred, and the first thought of those who had left the pit, only a quarter of an hour before, was to congratulate themselves and each other on their safety.

It seemed as if the water could not have come in at a better time than in the evening, when the pit was

cleared of all the workers who had thronged it during the day. By-and-by a whisper passed round that the master and his son had been seen to go down an hour before, and that no one had observed them return. Mr. Franklyn was but little known and less liked among his work-people, but Rolla was regarded with a sort of affectionate intimacy by everyone. The tidings of his danger spread with the curious suddenness with which ill news does fly out, as if it tingled from heart to heart quicker than words could convey it. The whole country seemed struck and dismayed at once, and no one exactly knew how the tidings first reached him. An hour after the water had broken into the pit, half the miners in the district were assembled on the Red Hill, and Arthur Yonge was making the most of the last half-hour of twilight, by setting them to work, some to draw the water away by letting down buckets into the pit, while others were endeavouring to repair the broken pumps so as to make them available for drawing off the water.

Less than an hour after, the porters at the Little Combe Valley Station were going about their work with grave faces, and yet with an air of bustle and excitement that attracted the attention of the only passengers who got out at Combe from the late

London train, though one of them was so great an invalid, as to make his descent from the carriage and his passage down the platform a matter of some concern to his companion. The two were Colonel and Mrs. Edgecombe, and it was a long fought-against anxiety which both were hiding in their hearts, which made them so keen to notice the excitement they came into. Mrs. Edgecombe felt it, but Colonel Edgecombe put it into words first.

"How those men look at us," he said. "Ask them why. There is something wrong—at High Combe, perhaps. I must know at once."

"Will it not be soon enough when we get home?" Mrs. Edgecombe said, faintly.

But Colonel Edgecombe had already beckoned one of the men to him, and asked his question, "Anything wrong?"

"An accident at the Red Hill mine, sir. Water broke into the pit this afternoon, after the men had left work, but it's said that Mr. Franklyn and his son and one of the managers had gone down into the pit half-an-hour before, and have not been seen since. Hope it may not be true, sir," the man added, half frightened at the effect his tidings had on his auditors.

Mrs. Edgecombe hurried her son to the carriage

which was waiting for them outside the station, and seeing the important, serious faces of the servants in attendance, she made a hasty sign to them not to speak the tidings they were evidently bursting to tell, and gave impatient orders to drive quickly home. Anxiety to ward off dangerous agitation from her son was the uppermost feeling, but when she came to think over what they had heard during their drive, a terrible thought came into her mind which she could hardly endure silently.

"It does not sound a likely story," Colonel Edgecombe said feebly, after a long interval. "It is now, let me see, six weeks since Mr. Franklyn must have received my letter. Henderson suggested measures for drawing off the accumulated water, that would very much lessen the danger of its breaking in, and he offered to superintend the work himself; a man of his skill and experience cannot have made a mistake about it, and surely Mr. Franklyn could not be so mad as to neglect his advice. What letters have there been from Red Hill since I have been ill? I ought to have inquired sooner."

"Don't inquire now, Walter dear," Mrs. Edgecombe said, tremblingly. "You are far too ill yet to begin to think of such things."

"But I cannot help thinking, and it is worse for me not to have my mind set at rest. There surely must have been some acknowledgment from Mr. Franklyn of my letter. I remember now, I expected to hear from him while I was in London, and supposed he had sent his letter to Combe."

"I am afraid there must have been some mistake, then," Mrs. Edgecombe said, after a few minutes' thought. "We could not find any letter for Mr. Franklyn, left by you, when Rolla called for it."

"We—who do you mean by we?" Colonel Edgecombe asked, sharply.

"Sydney and I ; we both looked for it."

"Sydney helped you to look for it," Colonel Edgecombe said, and then he paused, and a dead silence fell between the two which lasted all through the rest of the drive—they could not see each other's faces distinctly, but each knew that the other was struggling to cast out a fear that neither would for the world have confessed. They did not get further in their suspicions than the thought that Sydney might have kept back the letter through wilfulness, or resentment, or jealousy, but the dread of making such a discovery, or getting even a little nearer to it kept them both silent,—breathless almost with suspense and fear. What a

long drive it seemed, and yet they dreaded the certainty their arrival at home would bring more than the suspense.

The bad news had reached High Combe before the carriage sent to convey Colonel Edgecombe from the station left the house. It was brought by Mr. Humphreys, whom Arthur Yonge sent to escort Clemency back to the Red House, and to break the news of her father's and brother's danger to her. He was too much wanted on the Red Hill to be able to go to her himself, but he wrote a few hasty words encouraging her to hope, which Mr. Humphreys was to give her when she was on her road homeward. Having received strict orders not to tell Clemency what had happened, till she was already on her way to where her presence would be needed, Mr. Humphreys was very impenetrable when he was first introduced into Sydney's and Clemency's presence. He had come to take Miss Franklyn home because she was wanted, he said, and nothing more could be got out of him. Clemency hardly cared to ask questions, only to hurry away without the loss of a moment, for she read in his face that something was wrong. But during the second or two, while she was out of the room putting on her bonnet, Sydney asked and heard the very words which had presented themselves to her

mind, the moment she caught sight of Mr. Humphreys' awe-struck, foreboding face. An accident at the Red Hill mine. Yes, she had known he was going to say that before he spoke, but it was an unlooked-for aggravation of the calamity, that Mr. Franklyn and Rolla should be the sufferers. She thought of Rolla's bright face appearing behind Mrs. Edgcombe the day when she had withheld the letter, and her brain reeled. Dead—drowned,—Rolla Franklyn the gay, pleasant playmate of her early days, and she left to bear all the weight of remorse and blame. Oh! how she wished that she could be there instead, hidden under the earth and the water, in the place of those who were suffering for her fault. Poor Mr. Humphreys was puzzled and distressed beyond measure by the wild, bitter words of self-accusation that came from her. There was no thought in her mind now of sparing herself any pain, any shame, only a feeling that she could never have enough shame and pain, and that there was a sort of relief in humbling herself and calling on every one she had ever known to blame and punish her.

"No, don't make excuses for me," she said, in answer to some soothing words with which Mr. Humphreys interrupted her incoherent confession. "I was almost surprised once to see how you blamed and despised me

for breaking my word to you. I did not understand then what wrong I had done; now I can ask you to forgive me, knowing how unworthy and false I was, and almost thinking better of you for scorning me."

"I do not condemn you. I have forgiven you long since," he said gently. "Who are we, that we should any one of us despise the other. You must not exaggerate the wrong you have done, or fancy consequences that do not belong to you. I don't understand what you are saying, but you know you always were prone to exaggerate and to make things look worse than they need," he went on, trying to smile. He would willingly have stayed with Sydney, whose state of excitement alarmed him, but Clemency entered the room as he finished speaking, ready to set off, and, fearing lest the composure she was striving to keep should give way at the sight of Sydney's agitation, he thought it best to hurry away.

Sydney followed them to the door, and stood out on the door-steps looking after them. There was no one within sight of the front of the house when Mr. Humphreys' carriage had gone. She let the heavy door shut behind her, and, being quite unable to stand, she sank down on the upper steps, and laid her face against the wall. She would never enter that house

again, she thought—never. She was not worthy—she should bring misfortune on it if she went in again. She would wait there crouched up in the furthest corner of the porch till her husband came back, see him and his mother enter, and then she would wander out into the dark, and hide herself somewhere where at least she could no longer bring disgrace and pain on those she loved. She had once before, in a vague, insincere way, wished to leave her home, but then no deeper feeling than discontent and mortified vanity had been stirring within her; the vanity and discontent had all been purged away in the extremity of her suffering, it was now in truth that the lowest place seemed too good.

The sound of approaching wheels made her shrink further into the shadow of the porch, and yet, when the carriage-door opened, and the light from the carriage-lamps fell on the faces inside, she could not help dragging herself up a little by clasping her arms round one of the pillars and leaning forward to look. When she saw her husband descend cautiously from the carriage, and by the help of his mother's arm, slowly and painfully mount the steps, she could hardly keep from crying out. She had not realised how much his illness might have changed him; she had been imagining him

as strong and vigorous as ever, casting on her one of the indignant looks under which she had so often trembled; the thought of turning away from him even with that look on his face had been bad enough to her, but to see him weak and wanting help, and to believe she had forfeited her right to offer it, was the last drop in her cup of remorse. She sank her head in her hands again—a moment more and he would have entered the house, passing her, and she believed she should die out on the steps there. Some kind of wail or cry must have come from her lips involuntarily, for the next moment she heard her name pronounced in tender, compassionate tones.

“Sydney, my poor Sydney,” and a hand was stretched out to her, a white, worn, invalid’s hand, trembling in its touch, and yet strong enough for her to cling to—stronger to lift her up than it had ever been before. “Come in. I cannot stand here any longer, Sydney. I am very weak still,” Colonel Edgecombe said, and, at the quiet, commonplace words Sydney’s senses came back to her. She sprang up, able now to prop his tottering steps, and help his mother to lead him into the house.

“Take care, not a word to agitate him yet,” Mrs. Edgecombe whispered as they crossed the hall together,

and, to Sydney's surprise, she found herself during the next hour quietly and naturally ministering to her husband's comfort, as if there were no dreadful disclosure hanging over her. Colonel Edgecombe had suffered very much from the journey; the motion of the carriage and the shock of the news he had heard, had brought back a return of pain and confusion in his head, and the sight of his suffering and the effort to aid Mrs. Edgecombe in applying remedies, for a time thrust aside other thoughts in Sydney's mind. Busy and anxious as she was, Mrs. Edgecombe could not help now and then, during the evening, letting her eyes rest on Sydney with a surprised expression in them. It struck her that the last six weeks had changed Sydney even more than they had changed Walter. It was not merely that she was pale and thin, and that there were marks of sorrow on her face—Mrs. Edgecombe had seen something of that before she left—it was that her whole expression of face and manner had changed. The restless, frightened, furtive glance of her eyes had given place to a sad, beseeching look, that went to Mrs. Edgecombe's heart; her manner, instead of being petulant and fitful, was one act of supplication; she moved about softly, silently, receiving each request for service with a touching look of gratitude that would have won

Mrs. Edgecombe over to her side, however great her former prejudices, or whatever her suspicions had been. Yet Sydney seemed to shrink from her mother-in-law's kind words and caresses, as if she were unworthy of them, and, through all her service, seemed to be trying to keep out of her husband's sight.

After some hours the paroxysm of severe pain passed off; Colonel Edgecombe sank into an exhausted sleep, and Mrs. Edgecombe, wearied with her journey, retired to rest, leaving him in Sydney's charge. The night's silent watching was a severe ordeal to her, one which, a few months ago, she could not have endured. To bear the terrible weight of her own remorse and to give no outward token of it, and seek no human sympathy, was an effort of self-control, for which only the dependence on Divine help, which she had lately learned, could have given her strength.

Colonel Edgecombe slept tranquilly nearly all night, and Sydney knelt by the side of the bed with her face buried in the pillow, trying not to see the scenes at the Red Hill which Mr. Humphreys' few words had pictured indelibly on her mind. The water rising up, and Rolla Franklyn's face, cold, and stiff, and white, far down beneath it. She could pray when her thoughts would take no other form, and her prayers were

no longer now petitions that she herself might be spared from punishment and pain, but rather humble offerings of herself to any pain, so that she might be saved from ever again sinning against others as she had done.

When the first rays of the morning sun streamed in at the window, she rose softly to draw a curtain closer, lest they should fall on her husband's face and disturb him; but when she returned to the bed again, she found he was already awake. He lay back feebly, but the expression of pain and bewilderment had quite gone out of his eyes; there was a look of inquiry in them, which Sydney understood and met humbly at once. He beckoned her to come and sit on the bed.

"Now, tell me," he said; "tell me all."

"Will it not harm you? Won't it bring back the pain?" Sydney asked.

"Suspense is worse—let me know all."

He took Sydney's hand as he spoke, and clasped it firmly, and Sydney began very quietly telling her story from the very beginning of her wrong-doing, in simple straightforward words, making no efforts to excuse herself—her deep heart-despair was too great for that—but, out of anxiety to spare him, refraining from exaggerated expressions of self-condemnation.

He listened to the very end without speaking, and without change of countenance, and when she had ceased to speak there was a long pause. His eyes dwelt on her face with an expression of sorrowful surprise that was harder to her to bear, as the silent moments passed, than indignation or reproaches.

"How shall I bear it?" she said at last.

"How shall we bear it?" he answered, gravely, and that was all he said.

No other word or comment on her story came from him, neither then, nor ever afterwards; neither question, nor reproach; but Sydney felt that those words said all—forgiveness and punishment to her, all in one. The loneliness of her sense of guilt was gone now he had claimed a share in it; but, with the relief, there came a new remorse for having so burdened him.

She rested her weary head on the pillow, and watched the soft light of the early summer morning creeping into the room; and a sense of peace came to her, in spite of all the anxiety and grief which burdened her heart. Life looked very awful to her, as she lay thinking of all that had passed and was to come. She thought she could never be lighthearted or gay again; she wondered at the rashness with which she had once clutched after duties for which she was not fit, and

trembled at the new ideas of responsibility which experience in suffering was bringing her, but the relief from the burden of concealment outweighed everything else, and strength higher than her own was given to sustain her in the conflict on which she had entered.

When Colonel Edgecombe spoke again, it was to remark on the advance of the daylight, and ask Sydney to inquire if any news had reached the house yet of what was going on at Red Hill.

Mrs. Edgecombe, who entered the room at the moment, tried to put him off with vague answers; but Sydney never ventured, during the terrible hours of suspense that followed, on a word of remonstrance against his determination to hear and know everything, and to exert himself to think of plans by which the efforts made for Mr. Franklyn's possible deliverance might be forwarded. She believed all that Mrs. Edgecombe said about the danger to Colonel Edgecombe, and the bad consequences that might follow such exertions, and suffered more than her mother at the thought; but she understood why her husband felt bound to make them, and bore her anxiety patiently, as part of her punishment.

On the afternoon of the second day, when only a few of the most sanguine people still cherished a hope that

assistance could reach the prisoners in the mine in time to save their lives, even supposing them to have escaped the first danger, Colonel Edgecombe insisted on going to the Red Hill himself, and Sydney accompanied him. They stopped on their way at the Franklyns' house, to inquire after Mrs. Franklyn and Clemency. The confusion and dismay there were greater than even at High Combe. Mrs. Franklyn was almost frantic, blaming every one, and insisting on speaking of the catastrophe as if it had been maliciously brought about for the express purpose of injuring her and her children. She would not take even such comfort as Clemency found in dwelling on the efforts that were being made for the possible rescue of the sufferers, for she persisted in looking on those who were making them as Mr. Franklyn's enemies, and would not believe in the sincerity of their zeal to help him.

"What was the use of making a fuss about getting out the water now that he was drowned," she kept on saying; "it must have been some one's fault that it got in just when he was there. No one should ever make her believe that it was an accident—an accident, she was quite sure, would have happened very differently. She should lay her husband's and Rolla's death to the Wilsons' and Arthur Yonge's account as long as she lived. She had

never expected anything better from them. Her poor dear Mr. Franklyn would agree with her if he were alive;" and she exhorted Clemency and Mr. Humphreys and every one who came near, not to contradict her.

Clemency, who would have liked to have spent every moment on the Red Hill watching for news, was obliged to control her own anxiety, to listen to and endeavour to soothe such complaints as these; for Mrs. Franklyn, in spite of the perverse form her sorrow took, really suffered extremely, and clung to Clemency's presence and ministration as her only comfort and strength.

"You must never leave me," she kept saying. "You will have everything to do for me and the children now; you are one of that sort of people who *can* bear things,—while I am all feeling, and must have some one to support me; it is lucky that you are left. After all, it would have been worse if you had been drowned instead of poor dear Rolla. No, my dear, you need not say anything about his perhaps not being drowned. The Wilsons and Arthur Yonge are not people to do things by halves. I have heard you say that yourself."

Clemency came out to the carriage-door to speak to the Edgcombes when she heard they were going to Red Hill. She looked very white and worn, and yet

not altogether so despairing as Sydney had feared to see her.

"No tidings yet," she said, with a faint little smile, as she took Sydney's hand; "no tidings yet, but Mr. Yonge does not give up hope; he says that Evans knows the mine so well, and that there is a long disused passage that slopes high up the hill; he thinks they may have retreated there. They are working to get the water out, and as soon as it is possible some of the strongest men will go down into the pit, and wade through the water to where they think they are. It must be known soon: these next hours will be the worst of all. Come and tell us all you have heard on your way back from the Hill."

"Thank you for coming out to speak to me," Sydney said, keeping a clinging hold of her hand. "I was afraid you would never bear to look at me again."

"At us," Colonel Edgecombe corrected her.

Even then, with her heart full of anxiety, Clemency understood by the tone in which the words were spoken, and the looks that passed between the speakers, that the full confession she had advised had been made and rightly received; and she gave Sydney's hand a warm congratulatory pressure before she drew hers away.

The carriage drove on to the Hill ; the crowd assembled made way for it as far as it could go, and then Colonel Edgecombe descended and walked nearer to the pit's mouth, Sydney supporting his feeble steps. They noticed, as soon as they got down among the people, that there was a stir and thrill of emotion among them ; the faces were all brightening, and words, spoken rather low, were passing round. Several eager speakers pressed forward to repeat the news to Colonel Edgecombe.

"They are alive ; yes, it is quite certain now. The first call was very faint, it might have been an echo, but now news has come from below that another cry, more distinct, has been heard. Mr. Yonge has gone down into the pit, and he is sure that his last call was answered. He and one of the strongest and tallest of the men are trying to make their way through the water, to where the sounds come from. It is a dangerous undertaking, but there is no want of volunteers to go since Mr. Yonge is there. He has chosen who are to help him, or more would have gone down into the pit than are wanted. We shall soon know who are saved. Some say it can only be Evans, who knew the mine, and would understand where to go to, but others who heard the call will have it that it was Mr. Rolla's voice."

It was perhaps well for Sydney that there was still some suspense left, or the revulsion of feeling from despair to thankfulness would have been too great. Some one brought Colonel Edgecombe a seat, and he remained for an hour on the Hill, while Sydney stood by him, sometimes gathering up for him the vague rumours of what was going on below, that circulated among the eager crowd, and sometimes discussing with Mr. and Miss Wilson, who had joined them, the best arrangements for conveying the sufferers home, if, or when, as they soon began to say, they were safely restored to the upper world.

For some time the reports that came up from below were not encouraging. The first attempt to get through the water failed; the men who tried to make their way along the level got out of their depth, and struggled back with difficulty. Then came the news that Mr. Yonge and one other man were trying again, and, ten minutes after, a long, loud cheer rose from the throng on the hill-side, which might have been heard miles away, for the intelligence had spread that a corfe was slowly being raised to the pit's mouth, in which was the unconscious, but still breathing form of Rolla Franklyn, supported in the arms of one of his rescuers; a second expedition through the water was being made

to bring away Evans and Mr. Franklyn, who were reported to be in a less feeble state than Rolla, though unable to do much to help themselves.

Rolla's white face and closed eyes were too like what Sydney had been picturing them to herself all this while, to make the first sight of them anything but a shock to her; but Mr. Humphreys' verdict that all would soon be well with him reassured her, and enabled her to share the general exultation.

Rolla was carried down the hill by some of the many hands eager to offer help, and placed in the carriage that had brought the Edgecombes there, and then Mr. Humphreys got in to support him, and Sydney and her husband followed, feeling as if they could never look long, or thankfully enough, at the pale face over which every now and then a slight quivering movement came, showing that life was still there.

Quickly as they went, the good news had reached the Red House before them, and Clemency was waiting at the wide-opened front door, to get the first sight of her brother. The crowd already assembled round the house was surprised and a good deal edified at the eagerness with which little Mrs. Walter Edgecombe flew up the steps and threw herself into Miss Franklyn's arms, crying and laughing on her shoulder, and pouring

out eager incoherent words of encouragement, to prevent her being startled at the first sight of her brother's inanimate figure and pallid face. "What a warm-hearted little lady she must be," they said to each other, approvingly, "to be so overcome with sympathy for her friend's joy." Almost all the people, who had passed the greater part of the last two days and nights on the Red Hill, were assembled round the house when Mr. Franklyn reached it half-an-hour afterwards; but there was no spectacle of welcome to him visible for their edification. His wife and daughter knew his moods well enough to reserve their greeting, even at such a time as this, till the doors were safely closed on curiously sympathising eyes. The gossips were obliged to content themselves with observing that Mr. Yonge, who had accompanied Mr. Franklyn to the house, and who had seemed disposed to take leave of him at the door, was invited to enter, and that he did not soon come out again. Well, Mr. Franklyn could do no less than welcome to his house the man who had saved his own and his son's life, let him have been ever so much a rival and an enemy beforehand.

There was a talk among the men of carrying Arthur to his own home in triumph when he did leave the Red House, but he escaped this ovation, which would

have been extremely disagreeable to him; by lingering till the night had closed in, and his admirers had gone away, weary of waiting for him.

Before leaving, he went with Clemency once more into Rolla's room. Rolla had remained in a state of half-consciousness for some hours, able to take the nourishment that was offered to him cautiously now and then, but in the intervals sinking into a sleep of exhaustion, from which it was thought better not to rouse him. After some hours, however, he awoke refreshed, and when his eye fell on Arthur, who just then came near and stood by his bed, the comprehension of where he was and of all that had happened, seemed to come back to him all at once. Clemency and Mrs. Franklyn, who were also in the room, hurried to him joyfully, when they saw that he was awake and restored to the full possession of his faculties.

Rolla's eyes brightened and sparkled with a gleam of the amused intelligence so often there, as they studied the three anxious faces bent over him; then he held out both hands to Arthur Yonge, but instead of the thanks which Mr. Franklyn expected to hear, he exclaimed, in a half-enquiring, half-bantering tone—
"Brother—at last? Yes, I see it is so. How grateful you must be to me. I always meant to serve you some—

how ; but I did not expect it would be in such a signal manner as getting myself buried alive that you might have the credit of digging me out again. Well, it was worth while. Twenty dying days would not have been too much for such a waking back to life as this."

CHAPTER XIX.

“ Not always fall of leaf, nor ever spring—
No endless night, nor yet eternal day ;
The saddest bird a season finds to sing,
The roughest storm a calm may soon allay :
Thus, with succeeding turns, God tempereth all,
That man may hope to rise, yet fear to fall.”

Southwell.

THE works at Red Hill were not re-opened for some years after the accident, and then they had passed into other hands than Mr. Franklyn's. This last misfortune, and the suffering he had undergone, entirely broke down his health and spirits ; he had no heart to struggle further for success, on the plans he had hitherto followed, and neither the capacity nor the kind of temper to make it possible for him to accept the assistance, or adopt the views, of his more successful neighbours. When, three months after the accident at Red Hill, a situation as superintendent of some mines in South America was offered him, he was thought by

every one but Mrs. Franklyn to act very wisely in accepting it.

The offer was accompanied by a stipulation that Rolla was to accompany his father, assist him in his work for some years, and succeed to his position eventually. And as most of the directors of the South American Company were Tunstall people, it came to be pretty generally known there that Rolla was the person originally thought of, and that it was at his request, and through his representations, that the appointment was at last given to his father instead of to him.

The departure of the whole family for South America was decided upon rather suddenly, and Clemency's last weeks at the Red House were so fully occupied in assisting Mrs. Franklyn in her preparations for the long voyage, that she had little leisure to dwell on the change which awaited her own life. She was married about a month before the Red Hill House party started for America, and returned to Tunstall in time to receive them all, in her own home, for the last week of their stay in England. When they had left, and time had softened the pain of parting, Clemency fell so naturally into her place in the quiet old house at Tunstall, that it seemed to her more like taking up an

old life than beginning a new one ; and the two years of her residence at Red Hill began to look like a dream.

The accident at Red Hill remotely brought other changes in the society of the neighbourhood as well as the removal of the Franklyns. Neither Sydney nor Colonel Edgecombe ever really liked High Combe afterwards, or could bring themselves to feel at ease among people, and in places, that recalled the faults and sufferings connected with that event. In spite of all the resolutions he made not to allow unpleasant recollections of the past to embitter his mind, Colonel Edgecombe, after Sydney's confession, felt almost as much confusion at meeting any of the Humphreys' family as his wife had once done, and was distressed at every allusion to the Red Hill accident, to Mr. Franklyn's failure, or to George Serle's embarrassments. Sydney was only too quick to perceive how sensitive he was on these points, and could not always conceal as bravely as she wished the bitter remorse his distress caused her. Mrs. Edgecombe, with the most earnest desire to restore peace of mind to both, was not the person to make a third in circumstances where extreme consideration for the feelings of her companions and forgetfulness of her own were called for. She grew so fully aware of her own deficiencies at last, and of the want of harmony in

the household, that, when at the end of his three years' leave of absence, her son announced his intention of returning with his wife to India and accepting any appointment that might now be offered to him, she acquiesced in his determination meekly, without venturing a word of remonstrance, or a plea on her own behalf.

The rooms of the great house at Combe began again to have the same uncared-for, unhomelike aspect they had worn during Colonel Edgecombe's first absence in India; and as passing years brought to Clemency new and more engrossing occupations and interests to fill her bright days, it became a matter of anxious calculation how much time she could economise from them to give up to the task of cheering her old friend in her solitude.

Her presence always did cheer Mrs. Edgecombe, and her visits were eagerly looked for; but at last a day came when her arrival was even more anxiously expected than usual, and when, on her entrance into the hall, Mrs. Edgecombe hurried forward to meet her with something of her old impetuosity of manner, and with the old beaming smile on her face.

"You did'right not to bring either of the children to-day," she said; "and how kind of you to come off at

once! I am so anxious for you to see him; and yet it would not do to frighten the poor little man with too many strange faces round him at first. I'm proud of the way he has taken to me; he will actually leave his nurse, a black woman—whom I don't like at all, by the way—to come to me. There now, what do you think of that?"

Mrs. Edgecombe threw open the library door in triumph, and pointed to a group seated on the floor: a black woman, white robed and white turbaned, and a pale-faced child of four leaning against her knee, while he languidly turned over a profusion of toys scattered round him.

"Come to me, Walter, darling," Mrs. Edgecombe called, and, after some further coaxing, the child crossed the room, and stood quietly by his grandmother's side, playing with her watch-chain, and now and then stealing half-frightened, half-defiant glances from under long, curled eyelashes up into the intruder's face.

Clemency, who had at first been dismayed at the contrast between the child's sickly, languid looks and those of the rosy faces she was used to see round her, considered him attentively, to discover some favourable points to comment upon.

"How very fair he is," she said at last. "A very

pretty, gentle-looking little fellow indeed, and (four years old, do you say?) certainly not short for his age. I should think he is nearly as tall as Clement, who is quite three and a half."

"Ah, but you are not to think of Clement while you look at him. It is not a fair comparison—think of the long voyage and all the disadvantages he has had. Three months hence, when High Combe air has brought the roses into his cheeks, you may compare him with whom you will. But are not you struck with the likeness?"

"To his mother, yes. His expression and way of holding his head remind me so much of her, and that pretty, shy way of peeping up under his eyelashes."

"But he is not in reality the very least shy. Come, hold up your head, Walter, and let us see your eyes. It is quite nonsense in him to pretend to be afraid, for he has really a great deal of spirit. He may be a little languid after his journey, but by-and-by he will do himself justice, and you will be as much struck with his likeness to his father as I cannot help being now. There, run away and play my darling—run out into the garden and make as much noise as ever you like."

The little Indian's languid attempts to run and play

and make a noise, looked rather pitiful to Clemency. As her eye followed him about, her thoughts were full of plans for introducing him to companions who could show him what good, healthy, noisy play really was.

Mrs. Edgecombe sat for some time also watching her little grandchild silently, and when she turned to speak to Clemency again, the bright look had somewhat faded from her face.

"I must not let it be a new idolatry," she said, sighing, "or build up a fresh edifice of delusions. I am in as much danger as ever, I perceive, and you are as pitilessly determined to hold up unpalatable truths before my eyes as Aunt Bessie used to be."

"Unpalatable truths—the likeness to his mother! But dear Mrs. Edgecombe, I did not know it would be an unpalatable truth. I am so sorry; I would have held my tongue if I had had the least idea such a remark could have given you pain. Why should it? You have had such satisfaction in your Indian letters lately, and, when there was a talk of Colonel and Mrs. Edgecombe coming home, you looked forward with equal pleasure to seeing them both."

"But when they decided not to come, but to give me this little fellow instead of themselves, I felt there was wisdom in the decision. There are some pains that

don't heal, some regrets that can never be put away, —at least for people like me, who know so well what they want, and have had such beautiful visions. I know I ought to be satisfied ; I hear nothing but good of my son and daughter ; their letters to me are as affectionate as possible, and they always speak of themselves as perfectly contented and happy. If Walter is ever dull and lonely, he does not complain. I don't think it can be very good for him, mentally, to have for his constant companion a wife who is incapable of anything but ignorant admiration for all he says and does, and I have my own suspicions that he must find it a little tiresome sometimes. However, he is very good and tolerant, and makes the best of his lot. I must not say anything, for I often think now that it was my doing, my mistake, in fostering his boyish vanity and love of rule, that made him incapable of choosing more worthily. There is nothing like an overweening estimate of one's own claims, for clouding the judgment when the one important choice of life has to be made."

"It is you who are pitiless to yourself now, and I do not believe either that it is truth you are holding up. You know I always think you make too much of the necessity for intellectual sympathy between relations

and friends. People are drawn together, and love truly, and help each other worthily through life, by other means and through other ties than that."

"No doubt; but there must always remain a great want. I am not grumbling; Walter is as happy, I suppose, as any one has a right to expect to be, but I wanted one of those exceptionally happy lots for him that one sees sometimes—such as your own, Clemency. Can I not see what you are to your husband, and what he is to you? I am thankful for your happiness every day, but when I hear your husband's praises, when I hear people wondering at the amount of good he does, and the labour for others he undertakes, can I, knowing as I do who it is that encourages and strengthens him for his work, help drawing comparisons? Can I help sometimes picturing to myself what Walter's life would have been if he had had a helper instead of a hinderer by his side?"

Clemency's face flushed with pleasure, as it always did even now at hearing praise of her husband, but she answered gravely—

"While we have so little power of judging what the most important part of our work is, and how we are doing it, perhaps we can hardly say, who are the helpers and who are the hinderers. Mine is an excep-

tionally happy lot indeed, but I don't mind telling you now, that there was a time when I should not have chosen it—when it did not even seem possible for me. You may come some day to be as glad that your wishes have been unfulfilled, as I am now that one of mine was."

THE END.

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